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THE LIFE OF A KASHMIRI WOMAN

Dialectic of Resistance and Accommodation

Nyla Ali Khan

Foreword by
Gopalkrishna Gandhi

"Nyla Ali Khan's Story of a Kashmiri Woman is an interweaving of historical events, national narrative and counter-narrative, and personal memories that unpacks the legacy of Kashmiri nationalist and social and political activist, Akbar Jehan. For the first time, we hear the story of the woman next to the man in power, former Prime Minister Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah, highlighting Jehan's agency, voice and determination to make her own contributions to Kashmir's quest for independence and the creation of a secular, pluralist society. Written by her granddaughter, it provides insight into Jehan's character and family dynamics in the midst of contentious politics and intrigues, telling the inside story and challenging the dominant narratives of both hagiographers and critics alike. Unique in its vantage point and poetically written, it is a story of both triumph and heartache that is a tribute to the spirit of love and partnership."
—Natana J. DeLong-Bas, Ph.D, Editor-in-Chief, The Oxford Encyclopedia of Islam and Women and Visiting Assistant Professor, Theology Department & Islamic Civilization and Societies Program

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Also by Nyla Ali Khan

The Parchment of Kashmir: History, Society, and Polity (*edited, 2012*)
Islam, Women, and Violence in Kashmir: Between India and Pakistan (*2009, 2010, and 2011*)
The Fiction of Nationality in an Era of Nationalism (*2005*)

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This biography is dedicated to memory, personal and collective.

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14 I remember Akbar Jehan self-assured, articulate, politically savvy, and elegant person, whose social and political activism didn't dwindle till very late in life. 110

15 Grandmother, without uttering a word or expressing any emotion, breathed her last on July 11, 2000, in the doleful and funereal Valley. It seemed so difficult to lift the mood of melancholia that had engulfed my family and me. 122

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Foreword

"Behind every successful man ... "

I shall not even try to complete that clichéd, infelicitous and wholly banal saying. The way it has been repeated at speech after mindless speech and in serious writing as well is a reflection on the warped and trite thought-patterns of a succession of phrase-addicts. The key-word in that formulation is "behind," the assumption in the phrase being that the proper place for the woman is the shadowy spot one step behind the man. The man must move, walk, proceed and the woman must follow him. She must ever follow, much less lead the man.

The many movements for political independence and social change that wafted over the sub-continent of India in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries often saw women inspiring them, pioneering them, leading them, very often well ahead of their male colleagues. That many more ought and could have done so only shows the vice-like grip of custom and habituation which made women "home-keepers" and "minders of the home front."

This unusual work gives us the life-story of an altogether remarkable woman, whose gift in building and nurturing a family, was an integral part of a personality that was also building and nurturing a dream for her people's future in democracy and justice. Dr. Nyla Ali Khan has placed our and future generations in her debt by placing in our hands this first biography of her maternal grandmother, Begum Akbar Jehan Abdullah, wife and political thought-partner to the Lion of Kashmir, Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah.

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In his own auto/ biography, the Sheikh writes: "... I cautioned my wife-to-be that the person to whom she was being engaged had no idea of his future ... She said 'You are working for your faith. I am ready to go along with you and make any sacrifice I am capable of'." Akbar Jehan's intuition was flawless. Sacrifice and uncertainty were to be her lot as the charismatic leader's wife and, by that very role, as a leader, in her own right, of the people of Kashmir. In giving us, phase by challenging phase, the story of Akbar Jehan's defining contributions, the biographer also goes on to tell us what being a woman in modern Kashmir means, what being a Kashmiri means, what being a singularly distinctive individual of multiple identities means. The mindscape of the people of the Valley, of which Kashmiri Pandits are an invaluable and inextricable part, has remained un-probed, un-understood, un-written.

Kashmir is the very "Heaven on Earth" not just because of the spectacular beauty of its landscape but because of who and what its daughters and sons are. That India and Pakistan, in their un-ceasing argument over Kashmir, have been wholly unmindful of the thought-processes and heart-processes of the people of Kashmir is perverse. In facing the tangled betrayals, cunning deceptions and soul-hollowing violations of truth that the Valley has experienced, this life of a brave woman of the most exceptional sharpness is a pathfinder. In discovering Akbar Jehan, we retrieve something of a lost foot-track, a crumpled map and a bruised but still intact compass of tested veracity.

Gopalkrishna Gandhi[1]

1 Gopalkrishna Gandhi is the author of *Dara Shukoh* (a play in verse), *Gandhi and South Africa* (ed. with Enuga S. Reddy), *Gandhi and Sri Lanka, Nehru and Sri Lanka, The Oxford India Gandhi: Essential Writings* (compiled and edited), *A Frank Friendship/Gandhi and Bengal: A Descriptive Chronology* (compiled and edited), *Of a Certain Age: Twenty Life-Sketches*. He is the grandson of anti-colonial freedom fighters, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and C. Rajagopalachari.

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Preface

It hasn't been easy for me to write about the unique subjectivity of my maternal grandmother, Akbar Jehan. In my childhood, she was an integral part of the politics of her husband, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, Kashmiri nationalist and first Muslim Prime Minister of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. She was an iconic figure, a political and social activist, whose determination to further her husband's objectives and to bring her dreams of educational and professional advancement for Kashmiri and pastoral Gujjar women to fruition remained undeterred. To analyze the personal, political, and intellectual trajectory of Akbar Jehan—the woman, the wife, the mother, the political and social activist, and the Kashmiri nationalist, not simply an iconic figure that has cultural capital—has been an emotionally tempestuous journey for me.

When I thought of writing a biography of my maternal grandmother, Akbar Jehan, I wasn't quite sure what form it would take. Did I want to write a chronological biography, or a work of creative non-fiction? Did I want to dramatize the narrative? How did I think about her identity and selfhood? How did I think about the negotiation between Akbar Jehan's private self and her public persona? Could I write her biography without delving into the history and politics of Kashmir? Could I concentrate on her life while overlooking the historical and political processes, relationships, contingencies, and environment that shaped her? Would I need to delve into the sharp vicissitudes of her husband Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's circumstance and fortune in order to do justice to her biography? Is it

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difficult, even in this day and age, to account for a woman's influence and reputation in the public realm?

I would venture to say that a biographer, by necessity, is required to foreground the relation of her/his subject to the era in which she/he lived, which is a recognition of the politics of that age. My concentration on the lives of Akbar Jehan and Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah in this work, by no means, trivializes the historicity of the events in which they were major players. On the contrary, the biography of Akbar Jehan provides an insight into the history, politics, and society of Kashmir in the major part of the twentieth century. I make that claim while being aware that there are certain areas of obscurity in this work. I recognize that my reconstruction of Akbar Jehan is bound to be incomplete and temporary. For one, the power relation between women and men isn't central to my inquiry in this narrative. I have made the conscious choice, which, I daresay, every biographer is entitled to, of telling the story of a public life as opposed to probing the interiority of my subject.

Given my relationship with the subject, I didn't even consider deploying fictional methods or creating imaginary episodes. I am of the opinion that uncorroborated psychic disturbances, emotional upheavals, and imaginary conversations are best left to fictional works and biopics. This narrative is not a journalistic biography either. Scandal-mongering doesn't interest me. I borrow, I hasten to add, some of the techniques of fiction to set the tone of voice, which is sympathy and respect for my subject. Although the narrative is shadowed by my respect for my subject, it is not a work of pious memorialization. The biographical narrative is divided into chapters, which vary in length. It is less prescriptive than a novel, and the overlap between the personal and the political is accentuated. I begin each chapter with either a hypothesis or a rhetorical question drawn from the Preface or the Introduction. Instead of writing Akbar Jehan's biography in chronological order, I chose to dwell on certain critical junctures in her life: some of which I had witnessed; some of which had been witnessed by Mother, her siblings, and their associates; and some of which were well-documented.

After debating the issue with my academic colleagues, I decided that the best way to represent my subject was not just through anecdotes, but also through description, conversations, crucial historical and political junctures, in which she was in a decision-making position. Writing a biography entails selection and choice. So, I opted to incorporate paraphrased testimonies of family members about the personal ramifications

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of political events. Their recollections remove the abstraction of seemingly impersonal political and historical occurrences. I asked them questions about the happenings that I was interested in, enabling me to create the source materials which will further my inquiry. One's understanding of history is enriched by the historical interpretations and versions of events of living historical and political actors. I have also interspersed my memories with descriptions of historical and political events in which Akbar Jehan and the Sheikh were principal political players. This biography is not an attempt to redeem Akbar Jehan, but to fathom the state of wonder that I am drawn into when I contemplate the elusivity of a woman who was not afraid to live an unpredictable life, all the while seeking presence in absence, meaning in meaninglessness, and purpose in an existence that constantly threatened to fall apart.

My education has taught me that there are no value-free judgments. Historical and political judgments, inevitably, get distorted by an inability to recognize the biases that result from one's own location in time and space. So, I am not just retrospectively telling a life story, but my aim is to employ a theoretical perspective to better understand the position from which I write, which has been constructed by my political ideology, education, religious beliefs, history, nationality, ethnicity, class, and gender. After all, "all biography is a form of autobiography" (Lee 8). Perhaps that is the reason I interject the political and historical narrative, in a couple of places, with personal memories which invite biographical interpretation, making this work an auto/ biography.

My training as a postcolonialist leads me to question the infallibility of an "objective" opinion, particularly in a biographical narrative. So, while not identifying my life as closely with my subject as some biographers would, this work clearly incorporates the relationship between me and my subject. Literary biographer Hermione Lee observes that the value of a biographical work, particularly in the "modernist period," is greatly enhanced if it is written by someone who has known the subject intimately. The reader would do justice to my work by bearing in mind that "there is no such thing as an entirely neutral biographical narrative" (134).

My choice of subject was made for a reason. I am driven to write this work by my unquenchable desire to pursue intensive and thorough research on the political history of Kashmir through the lives of principal political actors, which is a work in progress, and, is by no means, near completion. I am also motivated by a need to challenge distorted descriptions of the sociopolitical conditions and historical context that produced

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Akbar Jehan Abdullah. My attempt is not, however, to interpret history through the subjective lens of contemporary politics. I write about phases of populist and electoral politics in Jammu and Kashmir in a particular context. At this phase in the history of the state, when large parts of the lives of Akbar Jehan and the Sheikh have been obliterated, I am intellectually invested in reconstructing my subject. As I explain in the Introduction, Akbar Jehan and Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah have been venerated and glorified as much as vilified, so I attempt to write about the public life of my subject with clarity, neither idolatrously nor iconoclastically.

There were times at which the insurmountability of the struggles that Akbar Jehan faced and the battles, which she fought, was overwhelming. Although this biography is not meant to reflect my sentimentality, I found it emotionally difficult to write about the time she donned the Sheikh's political armor at pernicious and iniquitous times. Also, sharing the reminiscences of those who knew her intimately actualizes her work, removes the opacity of iconicity, and epitomizes the historical figure, Akbar Jehan.

In this biography, my attempt is to steer clear of delimiting and conscripting narratives about Akbar Jehan Abdullah. The reason I am so interested in studying her life and work is because, to my mind, there is a historical value in revisiting and challenging the historical narratives about the political actors of pre- and post-1947 Jammu and Kashmir and the movement for an independent Kashmir. My attempt to highlight the history of a region in a particular era is not to localize it. I think it is important to reshape historical memory so that it includes the humanitarian and pluralistic endeavors of leaders of the movement at that critical juncture post-1948.

And although she was a woman, I do not celebrate her only as an event in the life of a famous man. I do not dwell either on Akbar Jehan's sanctification, or the backlash, which veered toward vilification, or to her resuscitation by some sections of Kashmiri society. I present to the reader a woman of iron-clad determination, persevering, articulate, politically savvy; a vulnerable mother and grandmother, who, at times, turned a blind eye to the faults of her children; a believer in traditional kinship structures; a dedicated social activist, fiercely proud of her heritage, and just as fiercely keen on preserving it; an independent woman whose life redefined the stereotypical feminist notion of "emancipation," because her desire for emancipation was mediated by a sense of responsibility to her community.

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Acknowledgments

While writing the biography of Akbar Jehan, I finally conceded that it takes a village to write a book. Writing a book is an interactive journey. I am grateful to the people who inspired me to write this book and encouraged me to complete it. Along the way, I cultivated and strengthened professional and personal relationships, which have enhanced my sense of purpose.

I am humbled by Gopalkrishna Gandhi's knowledge, encouragement, and kindness. My former professor and mentor, Vincent B. Leitch, has always been forthcoming with helpful advice. Professor Stephen E. Tabachnick's exhaustive and rich research on Lawrence of Arabia led me to question the allure of myth making. My colleagues and friends, Catherine Hobbs, Linda Van Ingen, and Bryan Hull, always gave me a patient hearing and enabled me to come out of my self-imposed seclusion while I worked on this biography. Editor of *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Islam and Women*, Natana J. Delong-Bas, first suggested, with enthusiasm, that I write biographies of my maternal grandparents. Kenneth Pearson at the University of Oklahoma library has been of great assistance to me. Jack Day, computer lab manager at the Department of English, University of Oklahoma, has been thoroughly professional in updating my webpages. I am greatly appreciative of the discernment and professionalism of my editor, Brigitte Shull, at Palgrave Macmillan. Ryan Jenkins, editorial assistant at Palgrave Macmillan, was prompt in responding to every query of mine.

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My father, Mohammad Ali Matto, has always encouraged me to think critically and to carve a niche for myself without toeing anyone's line. My mother, Suraiya Ali Matto née Abdullah, has always taken pleasure in my love of reading. She bears my forthrightness with great patience. My aunt Khalida Shah's keen interest in family-of-origin stories motivated me to dig deeper. A long-lost cousin, Cynthia Schmidt, enriched my knowledge of Akbar Jehan's paternal grandparents with priceless photographs and anecdotes. Late Salima Nedou and late Minno Nedou stimulated my imagination with stories of the past. My husband, Mohammad Faisal Khan, has always been a sounding board and helps me stay in touch with reality. My daughter, Iman, reminds me that the world is beautiful and life is meant to be lived. Last, but never least, the elusivity of Kashmir continues to fascinate me.

It was in this Valley of languid beauty, a cornucopia of passions, mysticism, syncretism, and evanescence, best symbolized by changing autumnal hues, that I came to consciousness.

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1

Introduction: Filiation and Affiliation

Abstract: *My personal reminiscences telling readers of people and events as I remember them adds the element of memoir to the narrative. Although the weaving of my personal voice into the narrative makes this work autobiographical, my memory and historical interpretation aid the act of writing political events and crises in the life of Akbar Jehan, which is very much the story of modern Kashmir.*

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I am not just retrospectively telling a life story, but my aim is to employ a theoretical perspective to better understand the position from which I write.

Through my previous and current work I attempt to recount a peregrination, which still continues, through the agency, volatility, conflict, politics, and history of becoming Kashmiri. I will not deny that I am also trying to make sense of a "personal intellectual trajectory" (Pederson 125). An important part of this work, for me, is the imperative situating of the female subject. It would be remiss of me to posit a hegemonic, North American, white middle-class feminist agenda as the reference point to gauge the import of other feminist concerns. On the contrary, I emphasize a politics of identity that would allow for the recuperation of the heterogeneous Kashmiri subject, which would undermine any attempt at homogenization.

Although I am wary of the construction of a monolithic "Kashmiri" female subject and well-aware of the restrictive politics of a homogenizing cultural nationalism, I do not wish to forestall the possibility of a unified subjectivity as the basis of nationalist politics. I acknowledge the political productivity of the construct of a unified subjectivity, while cautioning the reader against eliding specific, varied, and unique forms of agency deployed by Kashmiri women in times of relative calm, conflict, political turbulence, resurgence of nationalism, and internal critique not just of state-nationalism, but insurgent nationalism as well. Although every instance of the resurgence of nationalism in Kashmir has strategically employed the term "women" to further engender this category of subjects, I reiterate that there is no monolithic "Kashmiri woman."

I trace my origin to the hegemonically defined "Third and First Worlds." While I am filiated to the Valley of Kashmir in the State of Jammu and Kashmir (J & K), a unit in the Indian Union, I remain affiliated to the restoration of an autonomous Jammu and Kashmir. My move to the Mid-West complicated my already multilayered identity by adding one more layer to it: my affiliation with the South Asian diaspora in the United States. This affiliation, however, empowers me with an agency to inhabit a space that "slides both geographically and linguistically" (Warley 113). I am positioned in relation to my own class and cultural reality, my own history, which is one among many ways of relating to the past. I am also positioned in relation to my sensitivity to the slippery terrain of cultural traditions and to the questions and conflicts within them. My own struggle not just with the complicated notions of political

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subjectivity, regionalism, nationalism, but also with the effects of the homogenizing discourses of cultural and religious nationalism, my position as a Hanifi Sunni Muslim woman, and my diasporic position in the West further complicate my position. My concept of the political and sociocultural agency of Kashmiri women in contemporary society and my political interests and ambitions are shaped by how I see my past.

I have learned that a lot of the time cultural praxes exist independently of religious epistemologies. I have witnessed the militarization of the sociocultural fabric of Kashmir. I watch with remorse the clamping down of intellectual freedoms in Kashmir and the growing influence of bigoted elements in that polity. I am saddened by the shutting down of dissenting voices. I mourn the erosion of women's activism in Kashmir by the reduction of their identities to grieving mother, martyr's mother, or rape victim. I grieve the relegation of sane voices in civil society to the background. I am pained by the scathed psyches of women suffering psychosomatic illnesses in conflict zones. I question the reductive readings of diasporic positionalities in that society. But the despair and grief do not undermine my constant endeavors to make my diasporic self a politically powerful one.

As I write the biography of a Kashmiri woman, Akbar Jehan Abdullah, at a geographical and physical remove from my land of origin, the Valley of Kashmir, it is not the time or days of cornucopia, languid beauty, and mysticism of the Valley of Kashmir that haunt my memory, but the disintegration of that world and the subsequent dispossession and dislocation for some, which has had a profound impact on my subjectivity. My personal reminiscences telling readers of people and events as I remember them adds the element of memoir to the narrative. Although the weaving of my personal voice into the narrative makes this work auto/ biographical, as I note in the Preface, my memory and historical interpretation aid the act of writing political events and crises in the life of Akbar Jehan, which is very much the story of modern Kashmir. There are times, however, when I am wracked by nostalgia for a past when political repression, jeopardized cultural emancipation, bigotry breeding intolerance, militarization stunting growth were not even specks on the horizon. Perhaps, I speak from a position of privilege, which I examine in my work, previous and current.

To better fathom my nostalgia, I quote from Leila Ahmed's memoir, *A Border Passage*, here. The groundbreaking work of Leila Ahmed, Professor of Women's Studies and Religion at Harvard Divinity School,

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has influenced Muslim women scholars to critically engage with Islamic religious traditions and Islamic feminism. She writes

> In the poetry of Jalaluddin Rumi, the classic master-poet of Sufism, the song of the reed is the metaphor for our human condition, haunted as we so often are by a vague sense of longing and of nostalgia, but nostalgia for we know not quite what. ... We too live our lives haunted by loss, we too, says Rumi, remember a condition of completeness that we once knew but have forgotten that we ever knew. The song of the reed and the music that haunts our lives is the music of loss, of loss and of remembrance. (5)

Is nostalgia a dangerous emotion? Removed from the economic depredations of my country of origin, will nostalgia lead me to romanticize a constructed Kashmiri past? Does physical distance from the ground realities of Kashmir cause the diasporic subject to see the narrative of Kashmir as either one of seamless normalcy or one of seamless atrocities and lamentations?

I began to analyze in my academic work the issues of autonomy, self-determination, integration, armed insurgency, counterinsurgency, and militarization in Kashmir in 2005. That was when I came to realize that it was absolutely necessary for me to look into my consciousness to understand the political and sociocultural perspectives that had been inscribed on it. I grew up in a world in which my parents, Suraiya and Mohammad Ali Matto, were fiercely proud of their cultural and linguistic heritage (despite the onslaught of an enlightenment modernity), and honored their Islamic heritage, faithfully observing religious practices, while maintaining unflagging conviction in a pluralistic polity.

My parents, with their reserved dignity, integrity, unassuming pride, and unabated love for Kashmir, have been my role models. They have always explicitly cherished their heritage, while keeping themselves at a distinct distance from those who seek to impose a History on the landscape of Kashmir. Now that I look back with insight, I see that my parents, although well-educated and well-read professionals, did not internalize colonial beliefs about the superiority of European civilization or biased notions about the "degraded" status of Kashmiri Muslims, who had emerged from the swamp of illiteracy, poverty, and bonded labor in the 1940s. Their unremitting loyalty to the land of their dreams and hopes, Kashmir, despite the post-1989 militarized ethos and rabidity of bigotry has validated my admiration for their integrity and open-mindedness. They did not jump either on the bandwagon of statism or ethno-religious nationalism.

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Raised in Kashmir in the 1970s and the 1980s, I always knew that I, like my parents, would receive a substantial education and would have a professional life. I instinctively knew that they would protect me from the shackles of restrictive traditions and from the pigeonholes of modernity. My own wariness of statism, perhaps, stems from my mother's fraught childhood and youth. Her father, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, reigned as Prime Minister of the State of Jammu and Kashmir from 1948 to 1953.

When the pledge to hold a referendum in Jammu and Kashmir was not kept by the governments of India and Pakistan, his advocacy of the right of self-determination for the state led to his imprisonment. He was shuttled from one jail to another until 1972 and remained out of power until 1975. Despite tremendous changes in the world order, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah did not lose faith in the international system which was premised on Woodrow Wilson's principle of self-determination, post-World War 1. The Sheikh, I argue, sought self-determination for Jammu and Kashmir as a territorial unit, not as a Muslim nation. He wanted Kashmir to be an international polity. I posit that he perceived the evolution of Kashmiri nationalism in world-historical terms, as opposed to a domestic and local issue.

Her mother, my maternal grandmother, Akbar Jehan, supported her husband's struggle and represented Srinagar and Anantnag constituencies of Jammu and Kashmir in the Indian parliament from 1977 to 1979 and from 1984 to 1989, respectively. It is paradoxical that although she was a determined political and social activist, "according to biographical-genealogical conventions, the (lives of the) fathers are known and largely accounted for, while the (lives of the) mothers are unknown, unrecorded, and, until relatively recently, little explored" (Beizer 3). Akbar Jehan was also the first president of the Jammu and Kashmir Red Cross Society from 1947 to 1951. But during her husband Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's incarceration, she had been burdened with the arduous task of raising five children in a politically repressive environment that sought to undo her husband's mammoth political, cultural, legal attempts to restore the faith of Kashmiri society in itself.

Mother, perhaps unbeknownst to herself, had grown up with the fear of life's tenuousness and an acceptance of the harsh demands of public life. It took her a while to realize that it is impossible to please everyone all the time, unless one willingly relinquishes one's individuality. She has found, to her despair, unpalatable motives attributed to her parents and grotesque misinterpretations of their political, religious,

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and socioeconomic ideologies. So, she has learned that it is naive and detrimental to expect to have everyone comprehend what one says and attribute the right motives to one's cause. But her faith in the "New Kashmir" that her father's socialist agenda sought to fashion remains unshaken till now, despite the tribulations and upheavals that she has witnessed. She, like the rest of us, carries the burden of her own history.

After the rumblings and subsequent explosion of armed insurgency and counterinsurgency in Kashmir in 1989, a few of those organizations that advocated armed resistance to secure the right of self-determination for the people of Kashmir, in accordance with the United Nations Resolutions of April 21 and June 3, 1948, of March 14, 1950, and March 30, 1951, blamed the nationalist leader, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, for having, purportedly, succumbed to pressures brought on by the government of India in 1975. He had given the clarion call for Kashmiri nationalism. After 1975, the allegation leveled against the Sheikh was that he had, purportedly, capitulated to the insistence of the government of India to relinquish the struggle for autonomy or self-determination. It was a heart-rending period for Mother to see reductive readings of her father's ideology and the attempted erasure of the political and sociocultural edifice of which he had been the primary architect. In one of those few and far between moments of unburdening herself, mother recalled that the Sheikh had remained clear headed about his political ideology during his time in internment and even until he breathed his last. All that while Akbar Jehan had stood like a rock beside him. Not once had she buckled under pressure or tried to weaken his resolve. Although mother maintains a tenacious bond with family, friends, and acquaintances, and laments the innocent loss of lives in Kashmir over the past two decades, the rhetoric of revolution spouted in the early 1990s had a different undercurrent for her. Connecting to this rhetoric, for her, entailed a much more complex negotiation than it did for most people in Kashmir at the time.

It would be relevant to mention that the partition of India in 1947 into the dominions of India and Pakistan along religious lines enabled divisive forces of violence and brutality to rip the common anti-colonial, cultural legacy to pieces.[1] At the time, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah

1 India and Pakistan retained dominion status until they adopted constitutions of their own. India became a democratic and socialist republic in 1950, where-as Pakistan became an Islamic republic in 1956.

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harbored the mirage of an independent Jammu and Kashmir. But he believed, in the interests of expediency, that provisional accession to predominantly Hindu India was a better option than unconditional accession to predominantly Muslim Pakistan. He felt that the political voice and socioeconomic interests of Kashmiris would be greatly threatened and diminished by the plutocracy of Pakistan, which was predominantly feudal. The successful implementation of the land to the tiller program by the Sheikh Abdullah-led state government in Jammu and Kashmir would have been a pipe dream in a country like Pakistan, which was ruled by the feudal aristocracy.

The "defining moment in Jammu and Kashmir's post-Indian independence history" came in 1950 when disenfranchised peasants "were freed from the shackles of landlords through a law that gave them ownership rights on the land they tilled. ... The sweeping land reforms under the Big Landed Estates Abolition Act passed on July 13, 1950, changed the complexion of Kashmiri society. The historical image of the emaciated local farmer in tatters, with sunken faces and listless eyes, toiling to fill the granaries of landlords changed overnight into one of a landowner who expected to benefit from the labor he had put in for generations" (Ahmed, F.). This program emphasized the necessity of abolishing exploitative landlordism without compensation and enfranchising tillers by granting them the lands they worked on. Many policy makers in the Indian subcontinent, political scientists, and economists have acknowledged the effectiveness and rigor of land reforms in Jammu and Kashmir.

A large part of Jammu and Kashmir, post-1947, is administered by India and a section by Pakistan. China annexed a segment of the land in 1962, through which it has built a road that links Tibet to Xiajiang (see Rahman 5–6). As I underline in my monograph on Kashmir, *Islam, Women, and Violence in Kashmir: Between India and Pakistan*, the strategic location of Jammu and Kashmir renders it a covetous region for both India and Pakistan. The state borders on China and Afghanistan (Khan 7).

Before I proceed any further, it would be pertinent to briefly digress on the pluralistic polity of Jammu and Kashmir. The various ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups in Jammu & Kashmir, Kashmiri Muslims, Kashmiri Pandits, Dogra Hindus, Ladakhi Buddhists, and Shi'ite Muslims, comprise the pluralistic population of the state. According to the *Census of India, 2001*, Muslims constitute the predominant religious group of the state at 67.0%, Hindus at 29.6%, Sikhs at 2.23%, Buddhists at

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1.16%, Christians at 0.14 %, and others form the remaining part. The reality of Kashmir was vacillating even in 1947, because the Sheikh tried to create unity where none existed. The disparate groups have been unable to nurture a shared cultural and historical legacy that would enable them to fashion a cultural alterity to that of the Indian or Pakistani nationalist ones. But due to the regional sentiments that are becoming increasingly religionized, the ideology and rhetoric of a shared cultural and historical past have been unable to garner public support and mobilization for reconstruction and nation-building. The signifiers of nationhood in Jammu and Kashmir, flag, anthem, and constitution, have thus far not been able to move beyond a nebulous nationalist self-imagining. Now more than ever, the three regions of the state are at daggers drawn about the future political configuration of the state. This doleful truth was forcefully brought home to me at several conferences held in India and the United States.

A group of Kashmiri Pandits, for example, advocates the creation of a separate homeland for its community within the Kashmir Valley. The predominantly Hindu province of Jammu sees its unbreachable assimilation into the Indian Union as the only way to safeguard its future. However, of the original six districts of Jammu, the three predominantly Muslim ones, Poonch, Rajouri, and Doda, would, in all likelihood, align themselves with the predominantly Muslim Kashmir Valley. In the Ladakh region of the state, predominantly Buddhist Leh, which has always been critical of the perceived discrimination against it, has zealously been demanding its political severance from the rest of the state and pushing its demand for Union Territory status within the Indian Union, where-as the predominantly Shi'ite Kargil district in the Ladakh region does not perceive a jeopardized cultural and linguistic identity and advocates retention of its political alignment with the rest of the state.

In 1989 several armed separatist groups that owed allegiance to Pakistan surfaced in the Kashmir Valley as well, and for them the Sheikh's political ideology was anathema, which they sought to raze to the ground. There remains, however, a contingent in Kashmir that continues to believe in the efficacy of the Sheikh's policies and apotheosizes him as the symbol of Kashmiri nationalism. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, anti-India sentiments in the Kashmir Valley engendered tremendous support for Pakistan. It is pertinent to mention that, as a consequence of India's greatly fortified counterinsurgency operation in Jammu and Kashmir, the state is a highly militarized zone.

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The slogan of self-determination resonates loudest in the Kashmir Valley.[2] Among the Dogra Hindu populace of Jammu and the Buddhist populace of Ladakh, this slogan is regarded as exclusionary and insensitive to the diversities and divergences in the state. The political instability that has ensued in the wake of the rekindling of this slogan in 1989 is perceived as detrimental to the germination of developmental projects, institutionalization of political processes that would enable the devolution of powers to the grassroots cadres by the aforementioned populaces of Jammu and Ladakh. That perception, however, is not shared by the Muslims of the Kashmir Valley, who live in the toxicity of a trust deficit between the state and the government of India.

Father, an ardent believer in the vision of "New Kashmir" as well, has a clarity of thought that I esteem. He has had the satisfaction of knowing that he has lived his convictions. Although after the inception of armed insurgency and counterinsurgency in Kashmir in 1989 my parents were confronted with an uncertain future, in which the political fate of Kashmir was unknowable, they sustained their ideals through those difficult times. Father was raised in a large, traditional family that has

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2 "The territories of Kashmir, Ladakh, Gilgit, and Chenab were bestowed upon the Dogra ruler Gulab Singh for the paltry sum of seventy-five lakhs, in acknowledgment of his services to the British crown. ... The Dogras are a predominantly Hindu people who were installed as rulers of Kashmir under the Treaty of Amritsar signed in 1846. ... The last Dogra monarch, Hari Singh, succeeded to the throne in 1925. ... The unquestionable and eternal authority promised to the Dogra elite in the Treaty of Amritsar was cut short exactly a century later, at the time of India's independence and partition in 1947" (Khan, *Islam, Women, and Violence in Kashmir* 4–5).

When the monarch of Jammu and Kashmir, Maharaja Hari Singh, acceded to the Indian dominion on October 26, 1947, it was with the understanding that the accession was provisional. He officially ceded to the government of India jurisdiction over defense, foreign affairs, and communications. He was assured by the first Governor-General of India, Lord Mountbatten, that a referendum would be held in the state after the restoration of law and order in the Indian subcontinent. The popular vote would enable the administration to ascertain the wishes of the people. In January 1948, the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, brought the Kashmir issue before the United Nations Security Council. Subsequently, the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan was established in 1948 in order to facilitate a resolution of the Kashmir dispute to which both India and Pakistan were parties. The United Nations advocated the cessation of infiltration of tribal raiders, backed by Pakistani army regulars, into Jammu and Kashmir. The United Nations also proposed a program of gradual demilitarization and withdrawal of regular Indian and Pakistani forces, which were not required for the purposes of maintaining law and order, from the cease-fire line. The cease-fire line, now the line of control, is the border separating Jammu and Kashmir (Indian-administered) from "Azad" Kashmir (Pakistan-administered). But neither India nor Pakistan fulfilled the pre-requisites outlined by the United Nations in order to hold a plebiscite.

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always avowedly owed allegiance to the Sheikh's vision of a democratic, progressive Kashmir. That formidable vision had caused the dismantling of the safely guarded monarchical domain of privilege and power, which had disenfranchised the Muslim majority and reinforced the seclusion of Kashmiri women. Father's kinsfolk, I observe, espouses an essentialist and unified subjectivity. One layer of my subjectivity is, therefore, constructed within the nexus of gender/ class relations. Father does, occasionally, think critically about the Sheikh's legacy and the handling of that legacy by his successors, but more often than not my parents' sense of filial duty and kinship ties makes them silent, albeit questioning, observers of a political system that still leaves much to be desired. A lot of the rhetoric around them, statist or reactionary, does not directly speak to their own political dilemmas. However, as I have said, my parents have never lost faith in the sustainability of a pluralistic polity or in the resilience of the Kashmiri people.

It is with a complicated legacy as the backdrop that my own sense of identity as a "diasporic Kashmiri," an "Indian citizen," an "American Resident," and "South Asian" is entangled. It is the politics of upheaval and disruption that frame the lives of those of my generation who grew up in the turbulent gusts of Kashmir. The physical distance hasn't severed the umbilical cord that tenaciously binds me to the territory, the people, and the sociocultural ethos of Kashmir. Although I live and work in the diaspora, my passionate longing for Kashmir remains unabated; my prayers for a peaceful and conflict-free Kashmir in which its people will lead lives of pride, dignity, and liberty remain fervent; my dream of a Kashmir to which my daughter, Iman, can return not with disdain but with a prideful identity, one layer of which is Kashmiri, leaves in me an ache and a pining.

It was in the wake of the damning polarization, virulence, fragmented communities, and vehement disregard of the other caused by the overwhelmingly changing political configurations on the Indian subcontinent in 1947 that Ghulam Ahmed Mehjoor (1885–1952), renowned poet and esteemed Kashmiri nationalist, evoked a political and nationalist consciousness that thwarted the creation of religionized identities and communalized politics.

> Shun the dispute, open the discourse among yourselves,
> Share true love among yourselves,
> Cleanse your hearts, forget disputes,
> Say no to malice, share your pains,

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> Strive together in hard times,
> Hold each other's hands at all times,
> Milk is Muslim; Hindus the sugar,
> It is natural that milk together goes with sugar
> Co-existence in peace is the lesson Mehjoor teaches. (Mehjoor, 279, translation by Mohammad Ali Matto from the original)

I constantly engage with multilayered understandings of the Kashmir imbroglio and am gingerly moving beyond the contours of the militarization to nation-building and to the recuperation of a culture that is frightened and seeks to doggedly hold on to past legacies, which do not facilitate nation-building policies. In echoing Mehjoor's position, which is as relevant today as it was in 1947, my position reflects my particular hopes for Kashmir, and my commitment to, for want of a better term, the restoration of a "pluralistic" society in Kashmir, in terms of religious, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural identities.

Having looked deep within myself to articulate my vision of Kashmir and acknowledging my debt to Leila Ahmed, whose beautifully written memoir showed me the richness of analyzing the complexities of "moral, political, and intellectual positions" (Ahmed 211), I expound on the "personal reflexivity" of Akbar Jehan, which enabled her to make strides toward "reclaiming the political potential of socially situated, agentic, feminist, personal projects" (David and Clegg 495).

Can Akbar Jehan's life trajectory be viewed in ways other than the determinant ones? Unfortunately, the family archive isn't as much of a treasure trove as I would have liked it to be. I did find plenty of photographers, more from diasporic relations, but there was a terrible dearth of letters, journals, and other sources that could have provided rich interpretations and echoes of the multiple narratives surrounding Akbar Jehan. Despite the paucity of material on Akbar Jehan, I attempt to read her life more open-endedly, "to the threshold of possibility she herself envisioned at various turns" (Hirsch and Spitzer 61). I admit that I feel like a sort of Charon, ferrying between the past and the present, encumbered with the task of conveying the souls of the dead across the river Styx.

I seek to unburden myself of the encumbrance by recounting Akbar Jehan's life in a "less predetermined, less fixated fashion through" its "multiple resonances," thereby liberating it "from the one trajectory that leads to tragedy, enabling a multiplicity of possible meanings to emerge" (Hirsh and Spitzer 66). As Professor Myra Jehlen rightly observes,

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a woman's selfhood is contingent on her "ability to act in the public domain" (17). Akbar Jehan declared acceptable, in a conservative society and in a conservative age, that women were capable of exercising control and power. The model of hierarchy between men and women might be institutionalized in legislations made and executed by the state or in Muslim Personal Law, but gender ideologies are neither impenetrable, nor do they remain fixed till kingdom come. Even when cultural values and religious law are incorporated into legislations, they are capricious and subject to personal discretion (Doumata 228).

Given the substantive role that Akbar Jehan played in public events, she cannot slink into the shadows or be memorialized into the realm of abstractions. I do not wish to make a case for her canonization. I employ memory, particularly mine and mother's, oral testimonies, and I rely on written sources, works authored or coauthored by Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, some of which have not seen the light of day in a long time, to add layers of understanding to the tumultuous events that molded the history of Jammu and Kashmir. Feminist historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich makes a beautiful observation about the reconstruction of history, which speaks to my work,

> In the heat and confusion of events, people on all sides of an issue mine old stories for inspiration, enlightenment, or confirmation. Their efforts add to the layers of understanding attached to the original events, shaping what later generations know and care about. Scholars sometimes call these popular reconstructions of the past "memory" to distinguish them from formal history. But serious history is also forged in the tumult of change. History is not just what happened in the past. It is what later generations choose to remember. (xxii)

The life of the woman I write about was intricately tied with the political trajectory of Jammu and Kashmir. Delving into the labyrinthine issue of the Kashmir conflict and the part she played in it afforded me the glimpse, into her life, which I was seeking. In writing about her, I could not gainsay the tempestuous life and political career of her husband. Some of the choppy events of that life have been recorded, where-as others lie hidden in the catacombs of history, leaving the younger generation oblivious to the momentous changes in the regional political structure and collective psyche of the people shaped by those events. I am not interested in chronology, but in the ability of a conventional, religious, and progressive woman whose work was a powerful assertion of her convictions. One might espouse or discredit the politics embraced

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by the Sheikh and Akbar Jehan, but one would be hard-pressed to deny that the destinies of these political actors were inextricably intertwined with the history of the state, particularly the Kashmir Valley.

It is challenging to reconstruct women's lives, even those who have been visible in the public arena, because women are conditioned to wipe away their footprints and end up leaving very few traces of the kind that historical exploration would accept as legitimate. Akbar Jehan created a self whose destiny offered more possibility that most women of her generation could envision for themselves. Professor Carolyn G. Heilbrun reminds students of literature that "Acting to confront society's expectations for oneself requires either the mad daring of youth, or the colder determination of middle age. Men tend to move on a fairly predictable path to achievement; women transform themselves only after an awakening" (118). In addition to ensconcing herself within a classic patriarchal structure, that is, she married, bore children, and encouraged her husband to succeed in the world, Akbar Jehan's imagination was stimulated by "dreams of some other life: of personal accomplishment, of the understanding and control of hard facts and complex problems, of a place in a community where women were in sufficient numbers to render the accomplished woman neither lonely nor an anomaly" (Heilbrun 119). It is with faith in your sensitivity, reader, and with unflinching trust in your empathy that I write about the wish of my subject to inscribe and imagine the possibility of different destinies for women in a world that was not governed by the aspirations and wishes of those women.

The history of Kashmir, similar to histories of other conflict zones, has never been sanitized. Also, although a class / caste hierarchy does not enjoy religious legitimacy in predominantly Muslim Kashmir, socio-economic class and caste divisions in Kashmir are as well-entrenched as they are in other South Asian societies. A rigidly entrenched gender hierarchy exists in Kashmir also, although some substantive attempts have been made to deconstruct it. The role of women in a conflict zone; intersectionalities of class, education, ethnicity, religious identity in theorizing a woman's identity; women's agential roles or lack thereof are issues that can no longer be relegated to the background.

I do not hesitate to share with the reader my opinion that had Akbar Jehan played a more assertive political role in Jammu and Kashmir in the nineties, the organization founded by Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah in 1938, the National Conference (NC), would have maintained its representative character and would not have witnessed the painful corrosion

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of its mass base in the Kashmir Valley, which it did post-1987. I am, perhaps, toeing an unconventional line by allowing the theme of a woman's accomplishments to dominate the narrative, but I cannot do Akbar Jehan the gross injustice of relegating her responsibilities and ambitions to the background. I shrink from exploiting, what Professor Patricia Spacks observes in the writing of twentieth-century women's autobiographies, "a rhetoric of uncertainty" (113–114). Akbar Jehan, although a paradox, had the strength to inscribe narratives of women's possibilities, ambitions, and accomplishments. She saw women collectively, not individually, not ensnared in a familial framework, which wouldn't allow for an evolving consciousness. To recommend the "practice of self-consciousness," which is the "political, theoretical, self-analyzing practice by which the relations of the subject in social reality can be rearticulated from the historical experience of women" (Lauretis 186), is a daunting task. This endeavor emphasizes a narrative that highlights the collective articulation of a person's experience of gender.

In two decades, Akbar Jehan Abdullah has been glorified, vilified, held in contempt, and venerated. Historically, female icons have been "appropriated for contradictory causes. ... Confronting these shifting meanings, some people wonder whether history has any meaning at all" (Ulrich 227). Whether or not Akbar Jehan's work was transformative and resplendent in its revision of women's roles, education, and professionalization, whether or not she could have played a more agential role post the inception of armed insurgency and counterinsurgency in Kashmir, I venture to say, that you—the reader—would be the best judge after you have historicized her. Empathy might not come easily to you, because Akbar Jehan moved beyond the pigeonholes that conventional narratives have constructed for women. Narratives of women living complacently in traditional frameworks can be found a dime a dozen. I don't recall seeing her whiling away her old age rocking on the front porch, nor do I recall her baby-sitting her grandchildren or cooking elaborate meals for them, nor do I recall her awaiting another trajectory in her sons' narratives. Akbar Jehan was neither obscure nor was she unfulfilled. In all humility, I attempt to glimpse Akbar Jehan through all her personae, "which seem to preclude her right to be called woman. She may well for the first time be woman herself" (Heilbrun 131).

At some instances, in this biography, I refer to Akbar Jehan and Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah by their names, and at others I refer to them as Grandmother and Grandfather. The purpose is not to confuse

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you, reader, but to accentuate the richness and multilayeredness of their lives. I refer to them as Grandfather and Grandmother specifically in the sections in which I reminisce about the events that I witnessed. I have tried to distance myself from their politics in order to fathom the significant, not always popular, decisions that they took in their lives. But, as a granddaughter, I have the deepest affection and the greatest respect for them, about which I have never made any bones. I have attempted to study them as fallible human beings who, several times, found themselves at crossroads and didn't always make the most popular choices. I have also looked upon them as infallible grandparents who, at the end of their lives, were beset by infirmities and bedeviled by regrets. My affection and sympathy for my subject is not a handicap. Akbar Jehan and the Sheikh are not just subjects in this biography, but they are actors with agentive capacities as well, who were engaged in "a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment)" (Emirbayer and Mische, 964).[3]

While harboring their heritage, culture, and values of the past, Akbar Jehan and the Sheikh were well-aware of the exigencies of the present and had the courage to translate their vision into reality, thereby, opening a new chapter of peasant emancipation, and further instituting educational and social schemes for marginalized sections of society. Despite their flaws, I find an incredible depth of thought and strength in Akbar Jehan's and Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's politics, manifested in the dialectic of resistance and accommodation. I say this not as a granddaughter, but as a student of their life and politics. The Sheikh's nationalism, which I will expound on through the rest of the narrative, was premised on geography and history, not on religion. Akbar Jehan and the Sheikh clearly did not subscribe to the notion that a powerful global ideology, like pan-Islamism, communism, or fascism, could effectuate universal liberation.

The turbulence and turmoil that has haunted Kashmir for the past twenty-five years holds all of us, as a people, accountable for the degeneration of our politics and society. While it is important for us to condemn, question, and seek redress for the human rights violations

3 I have deployed this notion of agency in my first book on Kashmir, *Islam, Women, and Violence in Kashmir: Between India and Pakistan* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

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in Kashmir, it is also important for us to construct a politics that will enable the rebuilding of our pluralistic polity and society. The more we allow the depoliticization of Kashmiri society, the more subservient we become to forces that do not have Kashmir's best interests at heart. Today, mainstream as well as separatist politicians in the state have been discredited. The alternative is not the dismantling of the state's political structures and institutions of governance but the creation of a viable political structure, one is which, as my colleague, historian David Ludden points out, "a popular politics of mass mobilization is merged with institutional politics of governance promoting demilitarization and democracy." Kashmir cannot afford to lose yet another generation!

A point that I have made in several forums, and most recently in my interview with Natana Delong-Bas for *Oxford Islamic Studies Online* is that the foundation of Kashmiri nationalism was laid in 1931, and this nationalism recognized the heterogeneity of the nation. It was not constructed around a common language, religion, culture, and an ethnically pure majority. This process of Kashmiri nationalist self-imagining is conveniently ignored in the statist versions of the histories of India and Pakistan. Here, I also point out that there are some purportedly "subaltern" versions of the history of Kashmir which, in their ardent attempts to be deconstructionist, insidiously obliterate the process of nation-building in Kashmir in the early- to mid-decades of the twentieth century, inadvertently feeding off statist and oftentimes right-wing versions of history. In romanticizing militant resistance in Kashmir, such versions fail to take into account the tremendously difficult task of restoring the selfhood of a degraded people, and also the harsh fact that a political movement which does not highlight the issues of governance, social welfare, and the resuscitation of democratic institutions ends up becoming obscurantist. In trying to espouse anti-establishment positions, some of us tend to ignore the dangers of obscurantism and the growth of a conflict economy, in which some state as well as non-state actors are heavily invested.

We can all introspect a little and see how we can play a constructive role in our respective societies. I conclude this introduction with a paean to the fourteenth-century mystic poet, Lalla-Ded. I quote the translation of her *vaakh* (verse) here.

> "Think not on the things that are without,
> Fix upon thy inner self thy Thought:

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> So shalt thou be freed from let or doubt":—
> Precepts these that my Preceptor taught.
>
> Dance then, Lalla, clothed but by air:
> Sing, then, Lalla, clad but in the sky.
> Air and sky: what garment is more fair?
> "Cloth," Saith Custom Doth that Sanctify? (Lalla-Ded, "'Cloth,' saith Custom—Doth that Sanctify," in Temple, 172–173)

A woman ascetic of the fourteenth century, Lalla-Ded's *vaakhs*, for me, symbolize the self-actualization of a Kashmiri woman who had the sagacity, courage, and spiritual anchor to make interventions into a patriarchal history from her particular location. The life of the childless mystic symbolizes the connect between the spiritual and the physical aspects of the motherly role. Her verse, for me, a Kashmiri Muslim woman of the twenty-first century, adorns Kashmiri language, edifies the culture, and enriches its non-militarized ethos. Lalla-Ded's ability to be alert to how a woman's aspirations for personal emancipation are mediated by her responsibility toward her community, and the ways in which this sense of responsibility inflects her own emancipatory thought, underscores her importance for me. The veneration of Lalla-Ded by the Hindus as well as the Muslims of Kashmir is well-substantiated. My tribute to Lalla-Ded hearkens back to my suggestion that plurality, heterogeneity, and dissidence adorn the architecture of Kashmir, with an emphasis on local political projects, regionalism, peripheral social communities, traditions that survive the ravages of time, and marginalized forms of knowledge.

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2
Lineage and Coming into Her Own

Abstract: *Akbar Jehan's father, Michael Henry [Harry] Nedou aka Sheikh Ahmed Hussain, of Slovak and British descent, was a charming hotelier. His altruism and charitableness had given him a larger purpose in life. Her mother, Rani jee, was an indomitable Gujjar (pastoral tribe) woman. Rani jee's clan traced its lineage to the martial, patrilineal, and rigidly traditional Rajputs of Rajasthan. Despite the anxiety generated by her decision, Akbar Jehan, born with the proverbial silver spoon in her mouth, blessed with the knowledge that the world was her oyster, made the intransigent decision to throw in her lot with a determined and politically savvy young man, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. The Sheikh's fiefdom was the political battlefield; his entourage comprised the poverty-stricken, disenfranchised, dispossessed, denigrated masses; his palace was his home in Soura, on the outskirts of Srinagar, summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir.*

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Akbar Jehan's life trajectory can be viewed in ways other than the determinant ones.

Akbar Jehan's forebears, the Nedous, had emigrated from Dubrovnik, a Croatian city on the Dalmatian coast of the Adriatic Sea, to Lahore in British-ruled India in the 1800s. Croatia is currently an independent country, but from 1815 to 1918, it was part of the Austrian Empire, and from 1918 to 1991, it was part of Yugoslavia. Serendipitously, I found the naturalization certificate of Michael Adam Nedou, Akbar Jehan's paternal grandfather, in the depleted family archive. C. U. Aitchinson, Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab and its Dependencies, conferred upon hotelier, Michael Adam Nedou, on February 28, 1887, the rights and privileges of naturalization, in compliance with an

> Act passed by the Governor General of India in Council on the Sixteenth July One Thousand Eight Hundred and Fifty two, reciting that it was expedient to provide for the Naturalization of Aliens resident in the territories under the Government of the East India Company, it is enacted among other things that "any person" whilst residing in any part of the Terretories [sic] under the Government of the East India Company may present a Memorial to Government, praying that the privilege of Naturalization may be conferred on him "and that" that Government may, if they shall think fit, issue a certificate in writing reciting such of the contents of the Memorial "(so presented)" as they may consider to be true and material, and granting to the Memorialist all the rights, privileges and capacities of naturalization under this act, except such rights, privileges, or capacities, if any, as may be specially excepted in such Certificate. ("Certificate of Naturalization")

In the "Memorial" presented to C. U. Aitchinson, Michael Adam Nedou explained that he was born in Ragusa, Austria (Ragusa is the Italian and Latin name for Dubrovnik on the Dalmatian Coast); he was of Slovak nationality, and had been in British India for the past twenty-five years. At the time of the presentation of the "Memorial" Michael Adam Nedou was fifty years old and settled in Lahore in pre-partition India. He sought to be granted the rights and privileges of a British subject of Queen Victoria, "of Great Britain and Ireland, and Empress of India, within her Majesty's said Indian Territories," in compliance with Act XXX of 1852 ("Certificate of Naturalization").

He had sailed to India from Ragusa in 1862, where, after a period of adversity and hard knocks in which his will and perseverance had been tested, he had accomplished much. He had, corroborated Cynthia Schmidt, Akbar Jehan's cousin, crossed the roiling waters of the Mediterranean

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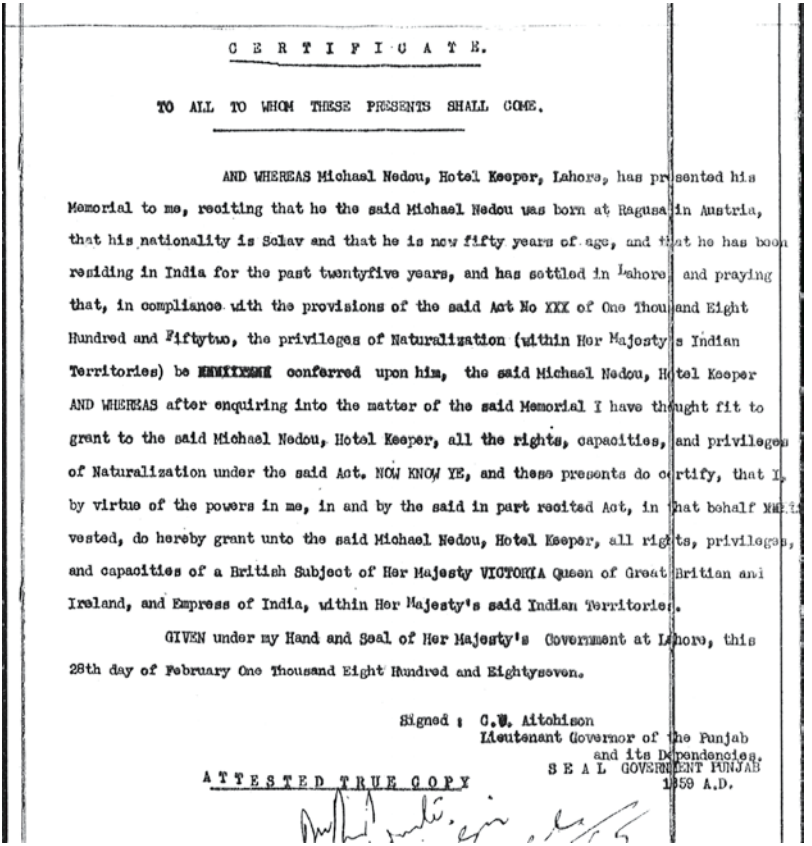

C E R T I F I C A T E.

TO ALL TO WHOM THESE PRESENTS SHALL COME.

AND WHEREAS Michael Nedou, Hotel Keeper, Lahore, has presented his Memorial to me, reciting that he the said Michael Nedou was born at Ragusa in Austria, that his nationality is Sclav and that he is now fifty years of age, and that he has been residing in India for the past twentyfive years, and has settled in Lahore, and praying that, in compliance with the provisions of the said Act No XXX of One Thousand Eight Hundred and Fiftytwo, the privileges of Naturalization (within Her Majesty's Indian Territories) be ~~xxxxxxxx~~ conferred upon him, the said Michael Nedou, Hotel Keeper AND WHEREAS after enquiring into the matter of the said Memorial I have thought fit to grant to the said Michael Nedou, Hotel Keeper, all the rights, capacities, and privileges of Naturalization under the said Act. NOW KNOW YE, and these presents do certify, that I, by virtue of the powers in me, in and by the said in part recited Act, in that behalf ~~xxxx~~ vested, do hereby grant unto the said Michael Nedou, Hotel Keeper, all rights, privileges, and capacities of a British Subject of Her Majesty VICTORIA Queen of Great Britian and Ireland, and Empress of India, within Her Majesty's said Indian Territories.

GIVEN under my Hand and Seal of Her Majesty's Government at Lahore, this 28th day of February One Thousand Eight Hundred and Eightyseven.

Signed : C.U. Aitchison
Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab
and its Dependencies.

SEAL GOVERNMENT PUNJAB
1859 A.D.

ATTESTED TRUE COPY

ILLUSTRATION 1: *C. U. Aitchinson, Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab and its Dependencies, conferred upon hotelier, Michael Adam Nedou, Akbar Jehan's paternal grandfather, the rights and privileges of naturalization on February 28, 1887.*

Sea and the Indian Ocean and borne the stormy turbulence of an immigrant's precarious existence to land on the shores of Bombay, now Mumbai, India. The lithe, imaginative, and vivacious young woman who later became his wife, Jessie Maria, made his acquaintance while visiting her brother, George, who was a sea captain in the British Royal Navy. That acquaintance, rather magically, metamorphosed into love, and the wedding was solemnized soon after their first meeting. Their older son, Michael Henry [Harry] Nedou, Akbar Jehan's father, according to his birth and baptism certificate, was born in Pune, British India, in 1877.

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Michael Henry [Harry] Nedou was one of nine children. He was born to Jessie and Michael Adam Nedou after six daughters, an event that was celebrated with much gusto. The birth of the second son, William Arthur Nedou, in 1879, was soon followed by that of the third son and youngest child, Walter Douglas Nedou (e-mail to author, January 20, 2013).

According to relatives, Akbar Jehan's paternal grandfather, Michael Adam Nedou started out as a photographer and architect, but destiny had willed otherwise. The decisions that he took shaped that destiny as though with the finesse of a calligrapher's brush. His first venture in hoteliering was the acquisition of the Sind Punjab Hotel in the port city of Karachi. He built the imposing and courtly Nedou's Hotel in Lahore, characterized by charm and grace, in the 1870s. He and his heirs later built the Nedou's Hotel in Gulmarg, Kashmir, in 1888. The hotel in Gulmarg sits on an elevation, overlooking the once luxuriantly lush

ILLUSTRATION 2: *According to family sources, Akbar Jehan's paternal grandfather, Michael Adam Nedou (sitting on a chair) built the imposing and courtly Nedou's Hotel in Lahore, in the 1870s. He and the rest of his family later built the Nedou's Hotel in Gulmarg, Kashmir, in 1888. The hotel in Srinagar was built in 1900. The young woman who later became his wife, Jessie Maria (sitting on Michael Adam Nedou's left), made his acquaintance while visiting her brother, George, who was a Sea Captain in the British Royal Navy.*

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meadow, with its cornucopia of fragrant, beauteous, and flourishing flowers. The riot of colors in Gulmarg in the summer has always had the power to revive my spirits! The cozy cottages around the main lounge, furnished with chintz drapes, chintz-covered armchairs, soothing pastel counterpanes on the canopy beds, and hewn logs around the fire places would warm the cockles of any anglophile's heart. Despite the rapid growth of monstrous concrete construction in Gulmarg, Nedou's Hotel has always retained an old world charm, maintaining, against all odds, its historical association, environmental importance, and architectural significance.

Akbar Jehan's sister-in-law, Salima Nedou, observes in her unpublished manuscript, "Michael Nedou was the pioneer of the hotel industry in India and he laid the first stone in the splendid structure of the country's hotels. His name is woven forever in the tapestry of our tourism" (16). The then grandiose Nedou's Hotel in Srinagar, which was opened in 1900, boasted a confectionary that, for a long time, had no parallel. The very thought of the delectable jams and jellies that we got from the Nedou's bakery in my childhood makes me drool. Until the eighties, Nedou's, Srinagar, epitomized a rare and appealing excellence, and a flawless execution, which, over the years, deteriorated. It is now, sadly, in a dilapidated state.

ILLUSTRATION 3: *Nedou's Hotel in Gulmarg, circa 1936. This hotel was built in 1888.*

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Salima Nedou provides an enchanting account of the "Protestant work ethic," entrepreneurship, and sheer grit of Michael Adam Nedou, his spouse, and children:

> Their summers were spent in Gulmarg and Srinagar, and for the winter, they moved to the splendor of Nedou's, Lahore. As Gulmarg was in those days a remote part of the country, everything had to be carried up the mountains by pony and labor. I sometimes wonder how great safes from London, billiard tables and pianos go to Gulmarg. People either walked or rode up by pony. Some were carried in chairs called "dandies." All came to escape the heat of the plains.
>
> Granny [Jessie Maria] was a shrewd and tough Victorian woman. She was faced with the hard work of helping in the hotels and bringing up nine children. ... Christmas festivities were in those days a time of abundance and merry making. Those privileged to be able to come to Nedou's had to book their tables well in advance. At Nedou's, preparations were begun weeks before. The Gulmarg hotel was closed by the end of October, but logs were chopped and Christmas trees were brought down to Lahore and Srinagar. The great halls and lounges at Srinagar were heated by log fires and stoves. In the kitchens under Granny's [Jessie Maria] supervision the Christmas puddings were stirred and hung in linen bags. The famous Nedou's silver was polished, and Christmas cakes baked by Goan chefs and their assistants.
>
> So the holidays passed. It was a time of goodwill, hospitality, and joy, and it all ended in the New Year's celebration, which after the dancing, all at Nedou's must have been exhausted.

This riveting account of the venturesome and risk-taking folk transported me so seamlessly to a different time that I thought of sharing it with the reader. Taking refuge in a "once upon a time" world does rid the soul of its afflictions.

In Akbar Jehan's father's lifetime, Nedou's hotels in Lahore, Gulmarg, and Srinagar retained their reputations as classy, plush, and magnificent havens in colonial India. Nedou's hotel in Gulmarg has been exquisitely and intimately described by M. M. Kaye in her whodunit novel, *Death in Kashmir*. Akbar Jehan's father, the stoic looking, stocky, and thickset, though not short, Michael Henry [Harry] Nedou, took over the management of the restful hotel in Gulmarg from his father. Several people have testified to his proverbial philanthropy, beneficence, and kindness. Mother tells me that his advocacy of the nationalist movement in Kashmir, the stirrings of which began in the 1930s, encouraged Akbar Jehan to relinquish a life of affluence and repose to marry Sheikh

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Mohammad Abdullah, the Kashmiri rebel. Michael Henry [Harry] Nedou "spent his time helping the poor, built houses for them, and saved people wrongly convicted from jail and twice from the gallows" (Nedou 59). Although a charming hotelier, his altruism and charity had given him a larger purpose in life which earned him the admiration and appreciation of not just the "highest names in the land [Lahore], but also those whose sufferings he had soothed and who remembered his kindness and charity" (Ibid). He was not the only member of the Nedou family who chose to convert to Islam. One of his cousins, enthralled by the tenets of the religion, the inspirational vision of the Prophet of Islam, and the unifying force of its credo, embraced Islam as well. Given Akbar Jehan's father's philanthropy, to which several people have attested, his volitional conformity to Islamic tenets, and his sincere endeavor to raise his children as Muslim would give a biographer ample reason to believe that his conversion to Islam was not a mere expediency.

Akbar Jehan's mother, Mir Jan, respectfully called Rani jee by relatives, friends, and acquaintances was an indomitable *Gujjar* woman, who has an imperturbable expression in all the pictures I have seen of her. Rani jee's clan traced its lineage to the martial, patrilineal, and rigidly traditional Rajputs of Rajasthan. The impression that I get from her pictures is that she must have been a phlegmatic woman, secure in the knowledge that she was propertied and wealthy. She didn't require anyone's good offices to lead a comfortable life. Her sturdy, reticent, and stouthearted siblings, Niyaz Bi, Subi Bi, Sardar Bi, Lali Ma, and Ferozdeen, were just as formidable looking as Rani jee. All of them were the proud owners of sprawling acres of magnificent land in Gulmarg, a resort which found a prominent place on the international map in the late 1800s and early 1900s through the endeavors of Michael Adam and Jessie Maria.

The interracial and intercultural marriage of Michael Henry [Harry] and Rani jee remained an unpleasant reality for Jessie and Michael Adam Nedou as well as their kinsfolk. They couldn't reconcile themselves to this unorthodox union. Given that reality, I wondered how the two Nedou's hotels in Kashmir had been inherited by the sons of this couple, who had been shut out and spurned by the rest of the kinsfolk. On doing a little more research, I discovered that the Nedous hotel in Lahore was sold in 1947 after the remorseless murder of Akbar Jehan's paternal uncle Walter Douglas Nedou's only child, John, on the premises. I don't know much about the circumstances surrounding that murder. After the partition of India, the only two members of the second generation of the Nedou

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family who spent the rest of their lives in the new nation-state of India were Akbar Jehan's paternal uncles, William Arthur and Walter Douglas Nedou, both of whom died, heirless, in Kashmir. The rest of the surviving Nedous moved back to England. So, it was natural for the hotels to have been inherited by Akbar Jehan's brothers, even though they hadn't been uncritically owned by their paternal grandparents and hadn't assimilated into the family.

Cynthia Schmidt, from whom I got invaluable information about the Nedous, reluctantly told me that she and her siblings didn't know Akbar Jehan and her brothers well until Cynthia and her mother visited Kashmir in the 1970s. She confided that the members of the Nedou family in England and Australia had been raised with a xenophobic aversion to anything interracial, which is why they were emotionally removed from their "mixed-race cousins" until they grew old enough to question such demeaning prejudices (e-mail to author, January 20, 2013).

From all accounts, Rani jee had clearly made a success of her interracial and intercultural marriage, a union which can be difficult to navigate even in today's global and cosmopolitan age. She knew how to keep the wheels of her household running smoothly without ruffling feathers. Rani jee was a forthright, courageous, and perseverant woman, whose ability to hold her own had won the heart of a sturdy European, Michael Henry [Harry] Nedou aka Sheikh Ahmed Hussain. According to family lore, while indulging in his favorite pursuit of hunting big game in the thick patch of entangled trees in the forest of Gulmarg, Michael Henry [Harry] was precariously perched on his stallion, Autumn, and was almost mauled by a black bear. The attack was predatory, and he could have been killed if it hadn't been for the quick thinking of a feisty woman, Rani jee, who, while watching from a distance, sent her employees to fight the bear off with machetes and staves. She made sure that the bedraggled European was nursed back to health under her watchful eye. There are a couple of apocryphal stories about how the marriage was solemnized, but I don't give credence to those.

Legend has it that despondency afflicted Akbar Jehan's parents, Rani jee and Michael Henry [Harry] aka Sheikh Ahmed Hussain, because, for several years after they were married, their house remained bereft of the patter of tiny feet and the heavenly mirth of children. So, they looked for scientific as well as spiritual remedies. After having been told about the religious life and spiritual prowess of *Maulvi* Mohi-ud-Din, they undertook a journey to Pattan in quest of peace and happiness.

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Originally from Amritsar, *Maulvi* Mohi-ud-Din had chosen to pursue a life of austerity in Nihalpur village, Pattan, which is in North Kashmir. Pattan abounds in orchards and, to date, boasts several monuments of historical significance.

A very erudite person, *Maulvi* Mohi-ud-Din had a master's in Arabic, English, and Philosophy from Punjab University, Lahore. While he was a student in Lahore, he was drawn to the tenets of the Naqshbandi Sufi order and, in following the precepts of that order, swore allegiance to *Maulvi* Shah Saheb of Lahore. He had given precedence to a life of asceticism over a worldly one.

In their despondency, Rani jee's and Sheikh Ahmed Hussain's meeting with the *Maulvi* was nothing short of a miracle. Looking upon them with benevolence, the *Maulvi* beseeched them not to despair and to invoke God's mercy through prayers and gratitude. He assured them that they would be blessed with bonny boys and a cherubic girl who would embody high ideals and piety. He told them to name the girl "Akbar Jehan." That girl, *Maulvi* Mohi-ud-Din prophesied, would be his spiritual child (Conversation with Parvez Ahmed Khan, Nephew of Maulvi Mohi-ud-Din, dated March 3, 2013).

It is clear that the bonhomie in the marriage of Michael Henry [Harry] Nedou aka Sheikh Ahmed Hussain and Rani jee's marriage was greatly enhanced by her status as the mother of four strapping sons, Omar Nedou, George Nedou aka Mohammad Akram, Harry Nedou aka Ghulam Qadir, and Benji Nedou aka Shamsuddin. Her only daughter, Akbar Jehan, born on March 24, 1907, was not particularly tall, but she had a regal demeanor, resembling a statue in dignity, grace, and proportion. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah writes of Rani jee in his auto/ biography that she was a virtuous, religious, and "good natured lady." He credits her, in his auto/ biography and elsewhere, with having infused the value of religious teachings and traditions in Akbar Jehan (*The Blazing Chinar* 138). In fulfillment of *Maulvi* Mohi-ud-Din's prediction, the only daughter of Rani jee and Michael Henry [Harry] aka Sheikh Ahmed Hussain, Akbar Jehan, could not only recite the Quran with devotion and piety, but could also expound on the exegetical thoughts that the *Hadith* (Prophet's Mohammad's sayings and religious practices), *Sharia* (moral code and religious law of Islam), and *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) generated.

Living in a culture that is plagued by a blinkered consumerism in which most people find themselves opting for situations that would be

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ILLUSTRATION 4: *L to R: Akbar Jehan, her mother, Rani jee, her older brother, Omar Nedou, her father, Michael Henry [Harry] Nedou. The baby on the father's lap is Harry Nedou aka Ghulam Qadir; the young boy on the floor is her brother, George Nedou aka Mohammad Akram.*

most lucrative, I write with wonder and amazement about a woman, Akbar Jehan, born and raised in the lap of luxury, who made the exacting choice of marrying a young Kashmiri Muslim greenhorn, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. The wedding took place on 5 Jamadi-us-Sani 1352 A. H., which would translate as 1933. The marriage was solemnized by *Mirwaiz* Ahmadullah Hamadani, eminent religious scholar and strong adherent of the Sheikh.

Akbar Jehan's appearance, as her photographs bear out, was as resplendent as her will was resolute. I remember her fierce though uncritical pride in the political ideology and cultural regeneration that she and her husband had fought a grueling battle for. She skillfully straddled the linguistic paradigms of English, Urdu, Gojri, and Kashmiri and just as dexterously straddled three cultural paradigms, European, *Gujjar*, and Kashmiri.

Despite the anxiety generated by her decision, Akbar Jehan, born with the proverbial silver spoon in her mouth, bedecked in jewels and

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bedizened in satin, made the intransigent decision to throw in her lot with a determined and politically savvy young man, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. The Sheikh's fiefdom was the political battlefield; his entourage comprised the poverty-stricken, disenfranchised, dispossessed, denigrated masses, and his palace was his modest home in Soura, on the outskirts of Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir.

Mother tells me that *Maulvi* Mohi-ud-Din, whom Akbar Jehan greatly revered, influenced her decision to marry the Sheikh, which, metaphorically, entailed swimming against the tide. I remember that whenever she encountered an ostensibly unyielding encumbrance, she would pay obeisance at her mentor's tomb in Pattan and, viscerally, submit to God's will. Every time I am wracked by doubt, I sincerely wish I could imbibe her faith, which some might think proceeded more from instinct than intellect.

ILLUSTRATION 5: *Akbar Jehan, born and raised in the lap of luxury, who made the exacting choice of marrying a young Kashmiri Muslim greenhorn, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. The wedding took place on 5 Jamadi-us-Sani 1352 A. H., which would translate as 1933.*

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Before his marriage, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah had undertaken the gargantuan task of determining his intellectual, political, and personal trajectory in an environment that sought to stifle even embryonic expressions of Kashmiri selfhood, self-determination, and nationalism. In this undulating landscape Akbar Jehan's resolute and self-willed temperament is amply borne out by her intractable decision to relinquish the safety, security, and plenitude of her maternal home for life with an idealistic, self-willed rebel. The political ideology of that rebel spoke to the repressed masses of Jammu and Kashmir in the 1930s and 1940s, but his political future was uncertain. Akbar Jehan had, of her own volition, embraced a path strewn with thorns. Lest readers perceive the former statement as the forgivable bias of a granddaughter, I would remind them that, historically, Kashmiri Muslims had not been allowed to climb the political and socioeconomic hierarchy during monarchical Dogra rule in the State. At the time, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's arduous construction of Kashmiri nationalism, demanding the political enfranchisement and socioeconomic empowering of Kashmiri Muslims was a nebulous and tottering enterprise. The success of his mission was, by no means, guaranteed.

Having been raised in a milieu that enabled Akbar Jehan to burgeon not just academically but socially and culturally as well, she was as much at ease campaigning at a political rally for the Sheikh's political organization, as she was in conversing with career diplomats and statesmen. I posit here that Akbar Jehan was one of the harbingers of State feminism in Jammu and Kashmir. I borrow Gul Ozyegin's proficient definition of State feminism: "the inclusion of women in political citizenship and top-down reforms initiated by the State, without the notable participation of women, for the improvement of the legal, social, and economic status of women" (33).

With the oral and historical resources on Akbar Jehan available to me, I investigate the impact of her work for the legal, social, economic status of women in Jammu and Kashmir. She was a passionate advocate of women's education, which would place girls, including those of impoverished backgrounds, in the public realm of ambition, power, and material well-being, "and scientific and intellectual life with a mission of modernizing the country and its people, side by side with their male peers" (Ozyegin 33). Akbar Jehan's work with Lady Mountbatten, wife of the first Governor General of post-Partition India, in the repatriation of young women who had forcibly been removed from their families

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ILLUSTRATION 6: *Akbar Jehan Abdullah and Lady Edwina Mountbatten with a grassroots activist in 1947.*

during the turbulent and bloody partition of the country, was exemplary. She worked indefatigably to restore the honor of those unfortunate women who had borne the brunt of communal vendetta, recalls her older daughter, Khalida Shah.

In rehabilitating these victims of the brutalized ethos of partitioned India, the first attempt was to restore them to their families. But if the families were untraceable in the chaotic and turbulent environment of that era, or if the women were afraid of being disowned by their families, who might have viewed their abduction as an irreparable loss of honor, they were provided with respectable lodgings in the Kashmir Valley. Some of these abducted women, even after they were found, chose to remain with their abductors in legitimate, sanctified unions, because they foresaw rejection, disgrace, and dishonorable isolation in their familial homes. Akbar Jehan and her colleagues ensured that the women who were separated from their families, physically, emotionally, and financially, were provided vocational training in the Valley, which gave them a means of sustenance (Conversation with author, February 1, 2012).

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A significant contribution of hers, which is not as extensively written about, was the formation of the Relief Committee in 1948 to provide succour to those who had suffered incommensurable economic losses because of the blow inflicted on tourism programs in 1947 and 1948 (Tasser 25). To what extent did Akbar Jehan's vision of a modern Kashmir challenge the contours of traditional roles for women and domesticity? Perhaps it was unavoidable that her ardent wish that women search for parity with men was inundated with patriarchal contradictions.

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3
Political and Social Activism

Abstract: *While a political consciousness was evolving in the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, Kashmiri women like Akbar Jehan, Mehmooda Ahmad Ali Shah, Sajjida Zameer, and Krishna Misri, among others, made a smooth transition from their conventional lives to people engaged in sociopolitical activism. Although women activists led the way by offering new ideas, building broad-based political coalitions, and working to bridge organizational divides, it was and continues to be an uphill climb.*

Khan, Nyla Ali. *The Life of a Kashmiri Woman: Dialectic of Resistance and Accommodation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. DOI: 10.1057/9781137463296.0009.

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I write about Akbar Jehan's life while focusing on the historical and political processes, relationships, contingencies, and environment that shaped her. I am also motivated by a need to challenge distorted descriptions of the sociopolitical conditions and historical context that produced Akbar Jehan Abdullah.

In what ways are women present in political contexts? Kashmiri women, from different walks of life, have managed against all odds to express their agency during the plethora of political, social, and military transformations in the past nine decades. The perception and manifestation of women's political struggle during the nationalist awakening in the 1930s became "a wider part of the politics of democratization and empowerment" (Chenoy and Vanaik 2001: 123). During the growing sense of nationhood in the 1930s, and during the political awakening in the 1940s Kashmiri women forged broad coalitions and informal networks to challenge state-centered, feudal, and elitist notions of identity and security. Kashmiri women perceived and articulated cultural and political resistance, during the invasion by raiders from the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan in 1947, in terms of clear nation-building programs, which involved reviving civil society, resuscitating the shattered economy, and building social and political structures. Subsequent to the accession of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir to the Indian dominion in 1947, while the Indian subcontinent was reeling from the mayhem of the country's partition, women's organizations attempted to contribute peace-building work at the local and regional levels. Have Kashmiri women signified a reconciliatory presence and been harbingers of peace? Does the insurgent movement in Kashmir stress women's political empowerment and address the protracted crisis for security and legitimacy?

While collecting historical records and individual testimonies to trace the historical lineage of Kashmiri women's sociopolitical activism, my curiosity was piqued by the feisty debates that were aroused by the tribal invasion of 1947. So, I dug into the archival material available to me. In a dog-eared copy of *Life* Magazine reporter Margaret Bourke-White's book, I found riveting details of her rich conversations with twentieth-century political stalwarts of the Indian subcontinent. Bourke-White, who was sent to India on assignment in the eventful late 1940s, writes enthusiastically about the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. She writes that the giant leaps taken toward democracy in the former princely state could be a harbinger for progressive movements and positive change in the rest of India. She sardonically tells the reader that the move toward

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achieving democracy in the state was expedited by the despotic ruler, Maharaja Hari Singh, when he fled his principality, leaving his subjects in the lurch.

This occurred at the inception of the invasion of Kashmir, in October of 1947 "when hordes of fanatical Muslim tribesmen were pouring in from Pakistan, killing, looting, and burning villages." This onslaught convulsed the entire Kashmir Valley, carrying "the raiders to the outskirts of Srinagar, the capital." In a quick and efficient response to the incursion, "the People's Party—or National Conference, as it is also known"—had put a representative government in place, "which administered food stores, organized a people's militia for defense against the invader, and started working on a new constitution." Jammu and Kashmir was terrorized by the willful infliction of pain and suffering on civilians during the fateful period of the partition of India. The communal violence in the Jammu province of the state was remorseless. The rapacity of the fanatical invaders seemed insatiable. Amidst that pandemonium, Kashmir was the first state in the newly freed Indian subcontinent to have its own written constitutional plan. "Members of the People's Party had studied constitutions from all over the world, particularly America," says Bourke-White. The constitution guaranteed enfranchisement of all adult citizens, men and women, and took particular care to protect the dignity and religious freedoms of minorities. The admirable egalitarian and democratic quality of their achievement was partially a result of the political dissidence and collective consciousness that grew in retaliation to oppressive monarchical institutions, which had curbed their freedom for generations and, she added "is in large part a result of clear vision of their State People's leader, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. The Sheikh is a legendary figure and is the first popular prime minister to emerge after the coming of Indian independence" (193–194). A people newly emancipated from the clutches of an oppressive and rigorous monarchy blossomed. In that euphoric atmosphere, no force seemed powerful enough to militate against the dream of a democratic and emancipated society.

The partition of India legitimized the forces of masculinist nationalism and enabled virile hatred for the "other" to irreparably mutilate a shared anti-colonial legacy and cultural heritage so systematically that the wounds inflicted by the partition are yet to heal. Shortly before the tribal invasion, while the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir was still an independent entity and had not acceded to either dominion, India

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or Pakistan, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah sent emissaries of the All Jammu and Kashmir State People's Conference to Pakistan to thrash out the terms of accession with those at the helm of affairs. Mohammad Ali Jinnah, leader of the Muslim League and founder of Pakistan was hesitant at the time to get involved in the internal affairs of princely states. Consequently, he did not meet with these representatives, "and many people have since said this was a great mistake. He might have had Kashmir with its three million Muslims if he had been willing to recognize popular rule" (Ibid.: 202–203). The People's Government of Jammu and Kashmir made a last-ditch effort to negotiate with the Government of Pakistan. The negotiations were still in the fetal stage when the truculent tribesmen of the Northwest Frontier Province began infiltrating Kashmir. The ink of their official seals on the "instruments of accession," affirming their loyalty to the Pakistani dominion, hadn't yet dried when these tribesmen began surging into Kashmir under the rallying cry of Islam, "making off with all removable loot—including women—leaving a trail of sacked and burned villages, and fighting their way through the heart of the Valley." These tribesmen, with their sacks full of booty and whetted appetites, arrived in Rawalpindi, part of Pakistan, only to indulge, yet again, in plunder and pillage to satiate their gluttonous selves. The fractious rioting of the tribal invaders caused the newspapers of Lahore, in the newly created dominion of Pakistan, to scream themselves hoarse in vociferously demanding an immediate withdrawal of the "crusaders," who had become a law unto themselves and Pakistan's proverbial Frankenstein (Ibid.: 204, Ayaz 207–210).

Apologists of the tribal invasion in Pakistan and present-day Jammu and Kashmir emphasize the rationale of the invasion, which, according to them, was to save the Muslim populace from the persecution perpetrated on them by the non-Muslims in Kashmir. If that, indeed, had been the reason, it would have been strategically advantageous and beneficial to their "cause" to have entered the state through Sucheet Garh into the Hindu-dominated part of the former princely state, Jammu. The Maharaja and his cohort were still licking their wounds and inciting the monarch's Dogra army to inflict atrocities on the Muslim populace of the Jammu province of the state. Such a maneuver would have enabled the unruly lot to damage the Srinagar-Jammu route beyond repair, thereby, ensuring the severance of Kashmir from the rest of India and attenuating the possibility of its accession to the Indian dominion. The Kashmir Valley, with its large Muslim populace and its resolute volunteer

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corps, did not require the services of the marauding and disgruntled tribals, whose prodigality on the Baramullah-Uri route created terrible misgivings among the people whom the marauders were, purportedly, saving. Even the patrons of the tribesmen couldn't turn a blind eye to the savagery and barbarity evinced by them on that "campaign" (see Sardar Ibrahim Khan, *Kashmir Saga,* 1965, for details of the ruthlessness exhibited by the tribals during the invasion, which the author characterizes as an inevitability of war, but cannot ignore).

Margaret Bourke-White's observations about the rapidly shifting boundaries and changing political permutations of that era are some of the most lucid that I have read. She astutely points out that the Kashmiris, who had been denigrated and never been permitted the use of arms when the Dogra monarch was at the helm of affairs, were organizing training squads not just for men but for women as well. Once the threat from the tribal raiders had been averted, literacy classes were started for the many illiterate members of the People's militia, who were taught not just the art of self-defense but were also encouraged to gain proficiency in reading and writing. Akbar Jehan, Mehmooda Ali Shah, Sajjida Zameer, and Krishna Misri played a monumental role in the articulation of cultural and political resistance (204).

While a political consciousness was evolving in the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, Kashmiri women like Akbar Jehan, Mehmooda Ahmad Ali Shah, Sajjida Zameer, and Krishna Misri made a smooth transition from their conventional lives to people engaged in sociopolitical activism. Organizing as the Women's Self-Defense Corps, they were oriented toward the goal of generating and strengthening a nationalist consciousness and selfhood. Sajjida Zameer played a pivotal role in the cultural movement, designed to articulate how Kashmiri women of different political, religious, and class orientations could become resource managers and advocates for other women in emergency and crisis situations. She recalls that the women's militia played an inimitable role in repulsing the raiders and thwarting their short-termist and haphazard tactics to forcibly annex Jammu and Kashmir, while unleashing a reign of terror in which even their co-religionists were nor spared. The women's movement was by no means elitist or exclusionary. In addition to upper- and middle-class women, even grass-roots workers like Zoon Gujjari of Nawakadal, Srinagar, Jana Begum of Amrikadal, Srinagar, and Mohuan Kaur, a refugee from Baramullah, Kashmir, were active participants in the women's movement. The Cultural Front of the

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militia sought to unite a variety of religious and regional groups in a single, national movement (e-mail from Sajjida Zameer to author, April 1, 2008). Most of the members of the Women's Self-Defense Corps were wives and mothers who shared the nationalist hopes, anxieties, ardent desire to be the architects of their future and inscribe their own destinies along with their male counterparts. But their participation in the fervent political awakening and cultural resurgence of that era did not, by any means, endorse the traditionally submissive and self-denying role of the wife and mother.

Kashmiri women played an unparalleled role in the Women's Self-Defense Corps (WSDC), formed during the creation of geographical borders, political animosities, and religious hatreds dividing India and Pakistan in 1947. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of substantive scholarly work on this revolutionary organization, which addressed women's initiation of political and cultural action in resisting brutal annexation. In my zeal to contextualize and historicize the culturally regenerative, politically emanipatory, and socially redemptive work done by this organization, I interviewed two of the three surviving members of the Women's Self-Defense Corps in 2008 for my monograph, *Islam, Women, and Violence in Kashmir.* The third member, Mehmooda Ahmed Ali Shah, then in her eighties, candidly admitted that she didn't remember much about that era.[1] Both my interviewees, Krishna Misri and Sajjida Zammer, spoke eloquently about the formation of the National Militia and Women's Defense Corps—volunteer forces of men and women organized under the leadership of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah—to rally their opposition to the legion of tribesmen from the North West Frontier Province, backed by the Pakistani army, when they crossed the border of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir on October 22, 1947, in order to coercively capture the state. (It is ironic that those who were considered invaders in 1947 were portrayed as liberators in the late 1980s and the early 1990s.)[2]

This organization, I underline, is a compelling example of the formation of a coalition across religious and class divides to further the

1 Mehmooda Ahmed Ali Shah passed away in March 2014.

2 Pakistani journalist Babar Ayaz points out, "The main concern of Pakistani leadership, not withstanding their lip service to the right of self-determination of the people of Kashmir, was revanchist. Naked reality is that Pakistan's policy makers' primary concern is that India's control over Kashmir gives it the control key to three main rivers—Indus, Jhelum, and Sutlej—which are the lifeline of Pakistan" (209).

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nationalist consciousness of a society in the process of self-determining. In order to facilitate the understanding of the reader of the sort of regenerative work carried out by this organization during the cataclysmic events of 1947–1948, I have reproduced the testimonies of Krishna Misri and Sajjida Zameer in the Appendix. In their testimonies, Misri and Zameer highlight the courage that Kashmiri women exhibited in that period of nationalist awakening to step out of ascribed gender roles to significantly impact sociopolitical developments in the state. My role as a biographer requires that I grasp the social and political assumptions which surrounded Akbar Jehan's involvement with the Women's Self-Defense Corps at that time and in that place.

Acknowledging Akbar Jehan's role in political and social activism during the turbulent partition of India in 1947, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah observes that in the midst of mass migrations, rapidly changing political configurations and emotional upheaval, "swarms of refugees were moving from one country to the other and sick and wounded were everywhere." He, at the time, poured his resources into alleviating the lot of both Muslims and Hindus. Being cognizant of the work that Akbar Jehan and her colleagues could undertake to mitigate the misery of uprooted, grief-stricken, and indigent refugees, the Sheikh asked her to join him in his task. "When I asked my wife about it, she agreed at once to help me in relief work. She gave up the *purdah* and did commendable work in organizing relief camps. For her hard work and sincere efforts, she was named 'The Benevolent Mother' by the Kashmiris and was known by this name throughout the state" (Abdullah and Gundevia, *Testament*, 35). At the time, the *purdah* reinforced a powerful cultural ideal and was a pivotal element in the reproduction of family status. Akbar Jehan's parents were part of the aristocratic and wealthy strata of society in which women's seclusion from the public realm and the donning of purdah were status markers. So her relinquishment of the security, privilege, and dependence that the institution of purdah bestowed on women was a courageous move.

Her valiance inspired other members of the women's militia whose conscripted worlds were becoming a thing of the past. Prior to my attempt at reconstructing Akbar Jehan Abdullah through written sources and an account of her life based on my memory and other surviving sources, history had done a rather inadequate job at memorializing her contributions. Her work of sustaining the community, caring for the marginalized and disempowered at a turbulent time wasn't captured by

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the avid historian. Alas, "for centuries," observes Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, the hands-on work of women in tending to the needs of the infirm, buoying up local communities, raising food for the impoverished, and rebuilding societies after ravaging wars has been peripheralized in official histories (227).

Marveling at her intrepidity and endurance, the Sheikh believed that Akbar Jehan had the backbone and grit to "turn her veil into a banner." Every serious student of the history of Kashmir knows that during the 1946 "Quit Kashmir" movement Maharaja Hari Singh and his loyal Prime Minister, Ram Chand Kak, deployed all the resources at their command to annihilate the aspiration of the Kashmiri people for responsible government.[3] In the wake of that movement, Akbar Jehan voluntarily relinquished her domestic role. She invested herself in inspiring the desire for a dignified existence in the despondent, the fires of whose hearths had been cruelly quenched. She stepped into the stream of public consequence by choice, not through "divine intervention" (Ulrich xxi).

Her foray into the public realm wasn't due to circumstances beyond her control but was agential. Akbar Jehan's commitment to work shared with the Sheikh may have become indistinguishable from her commitment to him, but collaboration did not make her work invisible. If anything, they showed ingenuity "in the combination of different kinds of commitments, including the work of homemaking and relationship building, the caring needed to nurture ideas and institutions" (Bateson 78).

I posit that similar to nineteenth-century French feminist leaders, Akbar Jehan, along with other women members of the Women's Self-Defense Corps (WSDC), "used the concept of motherhood figuratively to refer to women's spiritual qualities and social mission" (Allen 104). In doing so, they articulated a new sensibility linked by multilayered identities in which politics and selfhood are profoundly interrelated. Akbar Jehan's political and social activism for the empowerment of women vocalized the desire for freedom and liberation as "a historically situated desire whose motivational force cannot be assumed apriori, but needs to be reconsidered in light of other desires, aspirations, and capacities that inhere in a culturally and historically located subject" (Mahmood 223).

Although the members of the Women's Self-Defense Corps were harbingers of the political participation of women and fashioned educational

3 The Quit Kashmir Movement was launched to oust the Dogra monarchy, and to establish responsible government.

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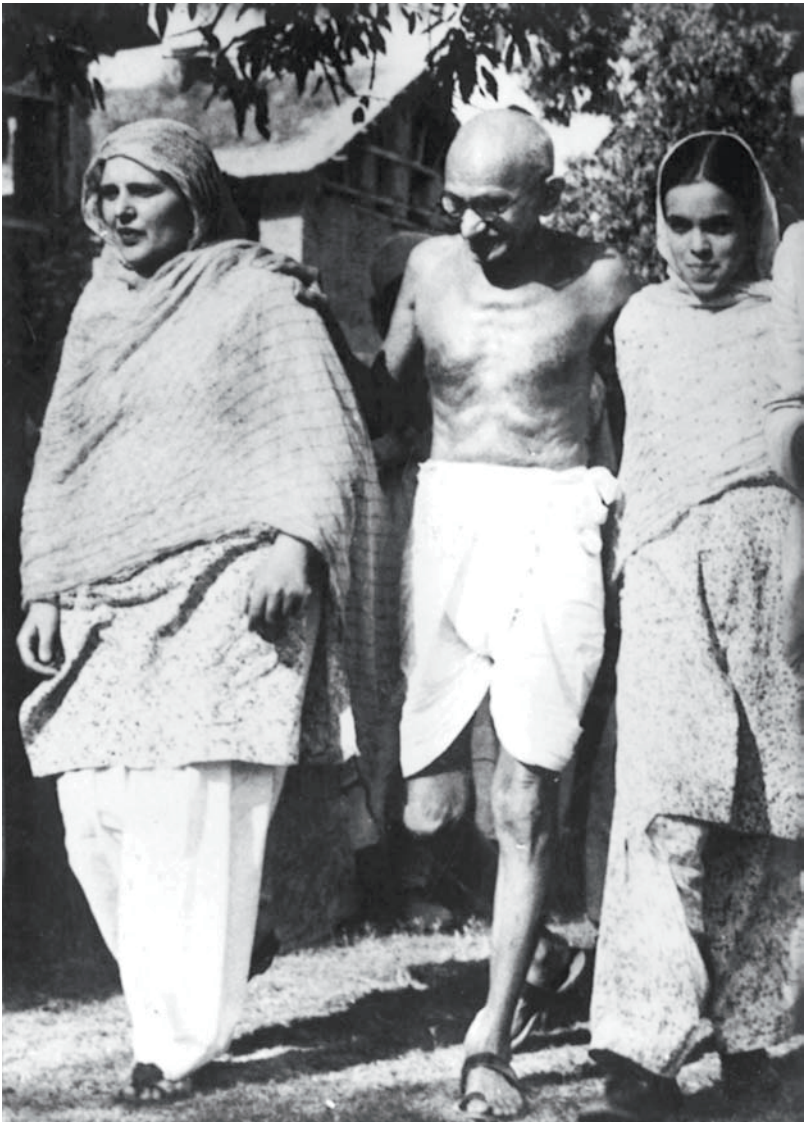

ILLUSTRATION 7: *Akbar Jehan and her older daughter, Khalida, with M. K. Gandhi, stalwart of the anti-colonial, anti-imperial, and anti-monarchical movement in the Indian subcontinent.*

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opportunities for them, I take the liberty of reminding the reader to complicate the conceptualization and measurement of Kashmiri women's empowerment. Enfranchisement of both women and men, and assuring women of equal opportunities with men in education are not empowering in themselves, but they cause a momentous shift in traditional gender relationships. The consequent opening up of new possibilities for the pursuit of democracy and regional peace create "the vantage point of alternatives which allows a more transformatory consciousness to come into play" (Kabeer 462). The social activism of the Women's Self-Defense Corps created spheres of emancipation for Kashmiri women.

I observe that the interactive grassroots outreach and mobilization tactics of the Women's Self-Defense Corps initiated an advocacy "on behalf of women which builds on claimed synergies between feminist goals and official development priorities" (Kabeer 435). This strategy made a more significant foray "into the mainstream development agenda than advocacy" which calls for the liberation of women "on intrinsic grounds" (Kabeer 435). As women's concern with family and society often manifests itself in social regeneration, this organization did not give either an essentialist Muslim identity or a Hindu one a privileged place in political discourse. Political assumptions and claims that unambiguously define religious identity and project it in order to solicit support "a negation of the role of values, understanding and intellect" (Smith 2001: 43). The goals of this organization in a turbulent and chaotic time were much higher than simply propagating and whipping up "combat locked within action and reaction" (Grewal 249). The Women's Self-Defense Corps did not espouse an identity politics that appealed only to that part of "individual identity that is shared in a collective identity." The question to ask about that kind of essentialist politics which the Women Self-Defense Corps disavowed is, "'Which collective identity?' It is a question that is never asked in the process of political mobilization on the basis of identity; indeed, the question is often actively suppressed, sometimes violently" (Smith 2001: 36).

One of the most formidable challenges facing the Sheikh and the social activism of Akbar Jehan was the palpable hostility between Muslims and Hindus and each community's assertion of an essentialist identity, which was the insidious fall out of the partition of India. About his tenure as Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir in 1948, the Sheikh admits that "the biggest problem for me was to create mutual confidence between the two communities and to remove all fear from their minds" (Abdullah

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and Gundevia, *Testament*, 41). It was in this climate of fear, paranoia, mutual suspicion, and vendetta that Akbar Jehan undertook the arduous task of attempting to bridge the nigh impassable gulf between the two communities in the state. It is necessary to recognize the determination and perseverance of other members of the Women's Self-Defense Corps as well in overcoming seemingly insurmountable challenges. The personal and political trajectory of Akbar Jehan's life affirms my belief that addressing wider political, socioeconomic, and democratic issues in Kashmir requires "rethinking the relationship between state and non-state actors, between state and society, and therefore between the structures of decision-making in these two arenas" (Chenoy and Vanaik 2001: 124). How did she do this?

Another example of women's agency in that era is the institute *Markaz Behbudi Khawateen*, established by Akbar Jehan. It exists yet today and continues to impart literacy, training in arts and crafts, health care, and social security as tools of empowerment. She invested her time and energy in the struggle for a vibrant Kashmir. She diligently garnered funds to build schools for indigent children and championed adult education in a state where a significant part of the population was illiterate. Building on the earlier gains, Akbar Jehan sought to ensure further economic, social, and educational gains for women and marginalized groups. The institute founded by Akbar Jehan, the *Jammu and Kashmir Markazi Behboodi Khwateen*, was registered under the Societies Registration Act of 1998. Its current vice chairperson and younger daughter of Akbar Jehan, Suraiya Ali Matto née Abdullah, provided information (e-mail dated April 10, 2008) about the aims and objectives of the *Markazi Behboodi Khwateen*. This Institute aims to impart intensive training to women in various arts and crafts, which would become a source of livelihood for them, enabling them to become better citizens and homemakers. *Jammu and Kashmir Markazi Behboodi Khwateen* also runs homes for destitute women and disenfranchised orphans and provides supplementary nutrition to preschool children in ghettoized areas. In addition to vocational training, they also provide lodging for working women from rural areas. This establishment effectively employs an instrumentalist form of advocacy "which combine[s] the argument for gender equality/women's empowerment with demonstrations of a broad set of desirable multiplier effects" offering "policy makers the possibility of achieving familiar and approved goals, albeit by unfamiliar means" (Kabeer 436).

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Suraiya goes on to say that this institute was the first non-governmental organization (NGO) in the Valley to help destitute women, indigent *Gujjar* and *Bakarwal* tribes of Jammu and Kashmir who are officially regarded as socioeconomically disadvantaged, and orphaned boys belonging to those tribes. "This particular NGO was later named after her and has grown by leaps and bounds in its infrastructure and activities." One of the great strides made is that a parcel of land which had been donated to her by the residents of Gulab Bagh, a locality on the outskirts of Srinagar city, now houses a school with a well-equipped dormitory for the students, most of whose parents struggle below the poverty line. The educational activities at the school are supplemented by the honing of students' creativity at the adjacent craft center. She is hopeful that the health issue of students and basic education about hygiene will be well-cared for at the school dispensary. She passionately observes, "Mummy was a role model for women's emancipation and empowerment, which is her lasting legacy not just to the Kashmiri nation, but to other South Asian Muslim women as well" (e-mail to author, February 14, 2012).

In order to correct the more simplistic generalizations that characterize formulations of Muslim women's identity, it is important to highlight the groundbreaking work accomplished by local agencies, cadres, and social networks in Kashmir. As I've said elsewhere, the distinction between traditional praxes and progressive roles prescribed for women within Islamic jurisprudence needs to be underscored by responsible scholarship and social work. It is in the arena of domestic politics and social activism that changes in gender composition "to favour [sic] women can have significant effects on policies and practices, and here that such rearrangements of personnel can themselves be seen as responses to the presence of real and growing social processes of a pro-democratic ... kind" (Chenoy and Vanaik 128). There is still a questionable unwillingness, which I see in several forums, both in India and Pakistan, to recognize progressive women's narratives in the larger political context of Kashmir.

Akbar Jehan's organization worked within the material reality and multilayered sociopolitical contexts of different groups of women in Kashmir. The institute founded by her endeavored to further the project of women's empowerment by deploying "collective solidarity in the public arena as well as individual assertiveness in the private" (Kabeer 462). Akbar Jehan, by virtue of her positioning within the institutional domains which make up Kashmiri society had a decision-making

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authority, which formed the vantage point from which she could conceive alternatives that would shape the processes of empowerment in a particular context.

Women's empowerment in the state entailed the participation of women activists in establishing a more inclusive democracy and new forums for citizen cooperation. Women active in politics in that era aimed not just to improve the position of their particular organizations but also to forge connections between the group's agendas for the progress of society with the agendas of other groups in the population, who had also suffered from the ongoing conflict. The assiduous work of Kashmiri women in civic associations and in government to lead the way toward a peaceful pluralistic democracy was further bolstered in 1950 when the government of Jammu and Kashmir developed educational institutions for women on a large scale, including the first University, and a College for women, as I outline in my monograph on Kashmir as well as in my article in the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Islam and Women* (113–144; 563–565).

The idea behind establishing these institutions was to develop the ability to organize and mobilize for social change, which requires the creation of awareness not just at the individual level but at the collective level as well. These institutions sought to develop self-esteem in Kashmiri women for which some form of financial autonomy is a basis. The goal was to provide women with the wherewithal to make strategic life choices that are critical for people to establish a more inclusive democracy and new forums for citizen cooperation. The educational methods employed in these institutions, back then, advocated practices that departed from established authority and doctrine, but were not, by any means, revolutionary (Misri 25–26).

In my interactions with women from Kashmir, I have realized that there is a serious lack of a feminist discourse in political/activist roles taken on by women in Kashmir, where the dominant perception still is that politics and policy-making are the job of the pragmatic, powerful male, not the archetypal maternal, accommodating woman. As in other nations in South Asia, women politicians are relegated to the "soft areas" of Social Welfare and Family affairs. Political parties in Kashmir, either mainstream or separatist, have not relinquished paternalistic attitudes toward women, and women's rights and gender issues remain secondary to political power. Today in Jammu and Kashmir, women politicians and activists constitute a minority, increasing the pressures of high visibility, unease, stereotyping, inability to make substantial change, and

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over-accommodation to the dominant male culture in order to avoid condemnation as "overly soft." I'm not sure how effective sloganeering and street protests by women in the recent past have been. Unless that kind of activism is integrated with institutional mechanisms, it doesn't have as much role to play as it could. The practice and history of women activists leading the way by offering new ideas, building broad-based political coalitions, and working to bridge organizational divides continues to be an uphill climb, but can reinforce the movement toward women's empowerment.

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4

Perseverance in the Face of Political Persecution

Abstract: *Akbar Jehan and her children were subjected to deprivation in the Sheikh's long absence after his ouster and arrest in 1953. They were condemned to isolation, but Akbar Jehan did not cringe. I still see vestiges of the distrust of statist versions of history and criminalization of progressive politics in Mother, which she must have imbibed in her inclement and agitated childhood. But Akbar Jehan was the powerful trooper, the silent force that kept the flag flying while anti-colonial and anti-feudal freedom fighters like Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, Mirza Afzal Beg, and other soldiers of the Plebiscite Front were shunted from one jail to the other, from one solitary confinement to the other.*

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There is a historical value in revisiting and challenging narratives about the political players of pre- and post-1947 Jammu and Kashmir and the movement for political self-determination. I employ oral testimonies and I rely on written sources, works authored or coauthored by Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, to add layers of understanding to the tumultuous events that molded the history of Jammu and Kashmir.

The Sheikh affectionately and appreciatively acknowledged the moral courage given to him by Akbar Jehan in exacting times. He addressed Akbar Jehan solicitously as "Begum Sahiba," and in family gatherings, he addressed her affectionately as "Buboo." He wouldn't hesitate to remind his children that Akbar Jehan's devout adherence to the external observances of Islam, which was in conformity with his own disciplined observance of religious duties, had cemented the commonalities between them. Some might want to believe that I am attempting to write a hagiography. But an appraisal of the germination and evolution of Kashmiri nationalism and the strategic designs to thwart it would enable one to deduce that even when the struggle for responsible government, and later plebiscite, faced inimical and malevolent opponents, Akbar Jehan did not cower, nor did she buckle under governmental pressure. "She [Akbar Jehan] ..., crucially, gave support and advice to her husband [Prime Minister, later Chief Minister, of Kashmir, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah], alerting him, for example, to the dangers of succumbing to Nehru's [Prime Minister of India] charm and thus compromising his own standing in Kashmir" (Ali 230–231).

The early part of Akbar Jehan's life with the Sheikh, even as the consort of the Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, was constrained by hardship, uncertainty, political duplicity, and constant attempts to curb freedom. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's ouster on August 9, 1953, at the behest of the Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, and his subsequent arrest, was an event that alienated the Kashmiri masses and cast his next of kin as personae non grata. The Sheikh's vociferous protests against, what he perceived as, endeavors to erode the constitutional autonomy of the state and undemocratically legitimize its integration into the Indian Union earned him the disapprobation of some of his former allies.

The Sheikh's testimony regarding his arrest in 1953 and the plight of his persecuted wife and children might benefit the reader: On the chilly night of August 9, 1953, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, Akbar Jehan, and their children were staying at the government guest house in Gulmarg

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while on a tour of that part of the Valley. They had been accompanied by the Sheikh's secretary and a couple of other staff members as well. In the wee hours of the morning, the Sheikh was woken by his alarmed secretary who tremulously told him that the guest house had been surrounded by "armed military police." On hearing this, the Sheikh sat bolt upright and strode out of his bedroom, only to find a police superintendent brandishing his baton in the living room. The Sheikh maintained his composure and calmly asked the police superintendent why he had swaggered into the guest house where the head of government was staying with his wife and offspring. The police superintendent did not reply. Instead, he produced a warrant for the Sheikh's arrest and menacingly pointed toward the well-equipped police cordon around the guest house.

Realizing that he had been deceived by those who had sworn allegiance to him and also by those who had claimed to cherish their ideological commonalities with him, the Sheikh prepared to go into incarceration. Dejected but not defeated, he asked the police superintendent to allow him time to say his morning prayers, to which the swaggering official readily agreed. Soon after the Sheikh had said his prayers, the aid-de-camp of Karan Singh, Regent of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, delivered a letter to him from the Regent, in which he had, ironically, commiserated with the Sheikh.[1] The letter also brought to the Sheikh's notice that he had been, without prior notification or consultation, dismissed as head of government by the Regent. The rationale provided by the Regent for the Sheikh's arbitrary dismissal was that his colleagues in the legislative assembly of Jammu and Kashmir, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, Shyam Lal Saraf, and Girdhar Lal Dogra, had lost confidence in his leadership.

Once the reality of the coup d'état sunk in, it was plain as day that his political adversaries had employed wantonly undemocratic stratagems to remove him from the position of Prime Minister. "At about 4:20 a. m.," the Sheikh recounts, "I bade good-bye to my wife [Akbar Jehan] and children and moved under a military escort to Udhampur, about 175 miles from Gulmarg." Subsequently, the Sheikh was held incommunicado in a house that belonged to the former Maharaja of Jammu & Kashmir and father of Regent Karan Singh, Hari Singh.

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1 The former Regent of Jammu and Kashmir, Karan Singh, is the son of the last monarch of the state, Maharaja Hari Singh.

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He was further anguished and disheartened on hearing that his house in Srinagar had been sealed, and Akbar Jehan and their children had been illegally evicted from the premises. The family was rendered fatherless and destitute. The autocratic and despotic regime of the newly appointed Prime Minister of Jammu & Kashmir, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, had instilled such fear into the hearts of the populace that people were afraid to be associated with Akbar Jehan and the Sheikh. In a situation of hopelessness, Akbar Jehan and her progeny were provided with a place to stay by Khwaja Ali Shah, brother-in-law of the Sheikh's older daughter, Khalida. But this arrangement hurt Akbar Jehan's pride, because she did not want to have to accept succor from her daughter's in-laws, which she considered an abomination. The Sheikh gratefully writes that "fortunately a Hindu, Madan Lal, came to my family's rescue and in spite of the coercive measures of the government, he extended a hand of friendship to my wife and children by offering them a portion of his house." The Sheikh's seemingly interminable incarceration took a heavy toll on his flesh and blood. The government, in a rare show of benevolence, offered an allowance to Akbar Jehan, but she adamantly refused to take it. Within a few months, the jail administrators decided that the Sheikh could not be held incommunicado indefinitely. He was allowed to meet with Akbar Jehan and his children after several months of seclusion, and, he notes, "I could get authentic information about events in Kashmir" (Abdullah and Gundevia, *Testament*, 47).

The attempted political, social, and economic marginalization of Akbar Jehan and her children during the politically tumultuous and ruthlessly arbitrary post-1953 era placed her in the unenviable position of being virtually disowned by her near and dear ones. Her brothers, George Nedou aka Mohammad Akram, Harry Nedou aka Ghulam Qadir, and Benji Nedou aka Shamsuddin, did not have the wherewithal or clout to help her. Also, Akbar Jehan's brothers, two of whom later became enterprising hoteliers, did not want to provoke the wrath of the government of India and the government installed by it in the state, which was led by Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad. They, like a lot of other people at the time, did not have the courage to overtly espouse the putatively wilting political cause of struggling for the autonomous status of Kashmir and for the right of the people of Kashmir to determine their own political future. Akbar Jehan's next of kin, excluding her mother, did not offer her a sympathetic ear or a shoulder to cry on during the traumatic period that Akbar Jehan's younger daughter, Suraiya, her siblings, and Iftikhar

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ILLUSTRATION 8: *Back row, L to R: Farooq Abdullah, Akbar Jehan Abdullah, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, Khalida Abdullah Shah; Front row, L to R: Mustafa Kamal, Tariq Abdullah, Suraiya Abdullah Ali.*

Ahmad, older son of Khalida and Ghulam Mohammad Shah, still recall with anguish.

Suraiya vividly recollects that the years between 1953 and 1964 were the most difficult in their lives. Her older sister, Khalida, was living with Akbar Jehan, my mother, Suraiya, and her brothers at the time, along with her three children. All of them faced innumerable hardships in those years. She narrates, "After the ouster and arrest of Papa in 1953, we were rendered homeless. A Kashmiri Pandit by the name of Mr. Madan and his wife offered their house to Mummy. At that very traumatic period, they were angels for us; and Mummy, my siblings, and I moved to Mr. Madan's comfortable house in Buchwara, Srinagar. Mr. Madan and his wife, a childless couple, lived in the house adjacent to the one that they had given us." Suraiya's brothers, Farooq, Tariq, and Mustafa were in college, and she was in Kothibagh high school at the time. The other almost insurmountable hardship that they faced was the health condition of Akbar

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Jehan's older daughter, Khalida. They were the unfortunate objects of the mechanisms of power operating in Kashmir at the time (Conversation with author, March 6, 2011).

The constant surveillance and penalties imposed on those who commiserated with the relations of a political prisoner discouraged physicians from taking the risk of tendering medical aid to them. In those desperate and grim times, Suraiya sighs and says, "God sent an angel in the person of Dr. Hafizullah who came to our rescue. None of us can forget that noble soul. Attempts were made by the then dispensation to curtail his professional and personal freedom for his sympathy with us and the professionalism he showed in treating the sick and the ailing in our house." She emphatically says, throughout that trying period, "Mummy remained undeterred, and our house became a site of struggle and resistance" (Ibid.).

Akbar Jehan's mother, Mir Jan Begum aka Rani jee, who has already been introduced to the reader, owned large acres of land in Tangmarg, a town in Baramullah district, and supported her daughter and grandchildren monetarily. Suraiya sagaciously points out, "Life taught us many bitter lessons during that undulating period." After eleven or twelve years of misfortune and tribulation Akbar Jehan and her children moved to Soura, on the outskirts of Srinagar, which was like starting a new chapter. Despite the deprivation and depersonalization that they faced, Akbar Jehan balanced conflicting demands, that of wife, mother, and political leader. She ran the Sheikh's political organization against all odds. "She was a tenacious link between the National Conference and Papa," Suraiya tells me, "who was in incarceration, first in Kud, a town in Udhampur district, and later in Jammu, where he ferociously fought the Kashmir Conspiracy case, despite the power apparatus deployed to defang him" (Conversation with author, March 6, 2011).

During Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad's regime, Akbar Jehan was to address a congregation at Hazratbal shrine, which was the hub of mass mobilization and political rallying then. Soon after the afternoon prayer or *namaz*, she rose to address the multitude of people there. It was then that a notorious goon, Salim Shawl, who was affiliated with Prime Minister Bakshi, appeared on the scene along with many of his henchmen, disrupted the public meeting, heckled, harassed, and beat the people gathered there. In a descriptive email, Suraiya observes, "There was chaos all around and an unmanageable stampede, but Mummy did not flinch and stood her ground. Some staunch workers of the Plebiscite

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ILLUSTRATION 9: *In this undulating landscape Akbar Jehan's resolute and self-willed temperament is amply borne out by her intractable decision to relinquish the safety and security of her maternal home for life with an idealistic, self-willed rebel whose political ideology spoke to the repressed masses of J & K in the 1930s and 1940s but whose political future was uncertain. Middle row, L to R: Mehmooda Karra, Farooq Abdullah, Akbar Jehan Abdullah, Tariq Abdullah, Khalida Abdullah Shah; Sitting on the Ground, Suraiya Abdullah Ali, Mustafa Kamal; Back row: The retainers who remained loyal to the family even in times of turbulence and turmoil. The only one I recognize is Amma, second from left. The attempted political, social, and economic marginalization of Akbar Jehan and her young ones during the politically tumultuous, dictatorial, ruthlessly arbitrary post-1953 era placed her in the unenviable position of being virtually disowned by her near and dear ones.*

Front managed to escort us unscathed to our car. A deeply religious lady, whose strength was a manifestation of her inveterate faith" (e-mail to author, February 14, 2012).

Unconstitutional and undemocratic methods were employed to install a loyalist of the Indian federal government as Prime Minister of the state, and to render Akbar Jehan and Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah pariahs. The ruination of a democratic edifice in Jammu and Kashmir and the degradation of a people who had gained dignity and selfhood after centuries of struggle were defining moments for Akbar Jehan and her children. So, the corollary is that while the reader might not consider substantive historical information of that fateful era necessary in Akbar Jehan's

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biography, I consider it incumbent upon me to bring out perspectives that have been ignored for far too long. The historicization of the staggering events of the fifties and the sixties has been swept under the carpet for so long that, other than serious scholars, very few people engage with the politico-historical perspectives and narratives of that era, let alone contextualize them.

While looking for archival material on the coup d'état of August 9, 1953, which still requires substantive research, I came across the correspondence between Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and G. M. Sadiq, a principal political actor and once a trusted comrade of the Sheikh, and in 1956 the President of the Constituent Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir. Sadiq's complicity with the arbitrary and undemocratic forces responsible for the coup was established beyond a doubt. In his letter to Sadiq written from sub jail, Kud, Jammu on August 16, 1956, the Sheikh, in the third year of his detention, eloquently and intrepidly protests his dismissal and subsequent confinement.

He articulately states that enough evidence had surfaced to establish beyond a shred of doubt that the August 9 coup was the fruition of a well-hatched conspiracy by communal and extremely conservative elements in politics "with whom the Bakshi [Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad replaced the Sheikh as Prime Minister of the state] clique joined hands in order to sabotage the great movement of which I have been the spearhead since 1931." He assertively observed that the newly installed ruling coterie in Jammu and Kashmir had eradicated the fundamental principles for which several of his comrades had sacrificed their lives during the struggle for responsible government and the sovereignty of the people of the state. The ruling clique had allied itself with the forces of centralization and integration "to crush the spirits of freedom fighters in the State of Kashmir which is being ruled by a lawless law of Preventive Detention, which authorizes arrest without warrant and detention without trial for a period of five years." The draconian law of Preventive Detention was frequently deployed to brutally curtail dissidence and to snuff out legitimate political aspirations, which might jeopardize the interests of the powers-that-be. This harsh law was brazenly used for coercing members of the opposition in the legislative assembly to tender their resignations (*Sheikh-Sadiq Correspondence [August to October 1956]*, 3–4).

The Sheikh protested, "To crown all this ignominious state of affairs, there is my continued detention without trial for the last three years extended from time to time for the sole reason of giving the present

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Government a fresh, albeit brief, lease of life." Needless to say, such a sordid situation had created terrible hurdles in the restoration of a democratic process in Jammu and Kashmir. It had invalidated a secularism that recognizes diverse religious identities and allows for the accommodation of those identities within a secularist framework. The Sheikh concluded his letter discerningly, "History has produced many quislings, but the world knows the doom of every enemy of the people" (Ibid.)

The Sheikh's well-articulated protests and Akbar Jehan's untiring efforts to disseminate his protests did not decrease the length and barrenness of his incarceration. The deprivation that Akbar Jehan and her children were subjected to in the Sheikh's long absence and the isolation that they were condemned to might have discouraged, even distressed some, but Akbar Jehan did not cringe. I still see a distrust of statist versions of history and criminalization of progressive politics in Suraiya, which she must have imbibed in her inclement and agitated childhood. But Akbar Jehan was the powerful trooper, the silent force that kept the flag flying while anti-colonial and anti-feudal freedom-fighters like the Sheikh, Mirza Afzal Beg, and other soldiers of the Plebiscite Front were shunted from one jail to the other, from one solitary confinement to the other.

In my monograph on Kashmir, *Islam, Women, and Violence in Kashmir* (2010), I have written about the vibrancy and zeal that the creation of the Plebiscite Front imbued in the stifling political environment of the state. For the benefit of the reader, I reiterate that in August 1955, eight legislators from the Constituent Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir spearheaded a political movement called the Jammu and Kashmir Plebiscite Front. The first president of this organization was Mirza Afzal Beg, who, at the time, was the Sheikh's committed and reliable lieutenant. Beg courageously led this movement during the Sheikh's probationary period. Akbar Jehan and other women leaders involved with this movement worked unflaggingly, behind the scenes, to create new openings for people, including women, to discuss public issues and become active participants. This is a little known and little written about aspect of the history of Kashmir.

Other women of that era, even those at the grass-roots level can be situated as women with agentive possibilities. For example, regarding the role of women in the Plebiscite Front, eminent journalist A.R. Nair lauded, in 1968, the remarkable work undertaken by the Plebiscite Front in instilling an irrepressible enthusiasm for participatory politics among

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rural women, who, he remarks, "seem to be as enthusiastic as men in these gatherings" (30). Highlighting the position of the woman in charge of the women's section of the Plebiscite Front, Nair went on to say that she was the widow of the driver of a horse-drawn two-wheeled vehicle (*Tonga*). Her husband had been slaughtered along with his companions while taking Hindu women and children to safety during the polarized and communally riven days of 1947. The widow of this murdered driver had risen to the position of an inspired and passionate leader of the women's section of the Plebiscite Front. Nair's surprise knew no bounds when this illiterate woman displayed her keen sense of political processes and "confronted" him "with an impressive array of challenging questions relating to the omissions and commissions of the Indian leadership toward Kashmir and the Kashmiri people." Although this woman, for all intents and purposes, was unschooled, she was ebullient with the newfangled ideas of self-determination, mass mobilization, and the voice of the people "to achieve their ends at any cost" (31–32). The Plebiscite Front established itself in the Kashmir Valley, which became its stronghold. The regionalist and dissident politics of the Front had garnered overwhelming support, enfeebling the autocratic government. I will return to the politics of the Plebiscite Front in a later section.

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Kashmir Conspiracy Case and World Opinion

Abstract: *During the ignominious Kashmir Conspiracy Case in 1958, the Ministry of Home Affairs [India] and its intelligence agencies worked assiduously to not just indict Akbar Jehan, the Sheikh, and their trusted colleagues, but to get them harshly convicted as well. In order to legitimize the crackdown on the blossoming political consciousness of Kashmir with unprecedented brutality, the Ministry of Home Affairs [India] in collusion with the Intelligence Bureau conspired to criminalize the political activities of the Sheikh, Akbar Jehan, and the Plebiscite Front. Ironically, the re-arrest of the Sheikh in 1958 and the harassment of Akbar Jehan created a constituency for his and Akbar Jehan's politics in those parts of the world that had lent moral support to India's glorious struggle for freedom in 1947. World opinion leaned toward equal rights and the self-determination of peoples.*

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In order to do justice to Akbar Jehan's life, I delve into the sharp vicissitudes of her husband Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's circumstances and fortune. The nationalism of Akbar Jehan and the Sheikh was premised on geography and history, not on religion. My attempt to highlight the history of a region in a particular era is not to localize it.

Interestingly, the irony of an "Indian Muslim" [Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah] being put behind bars for voicing and advocating the right of self-determination "by the very Indians who won admiration and sympathy in the world in attaining their own" (Extracts from Commentary by Edward R. Murrow, 1 May 1958) wasn't lost on the world community. Having been raised in a world polarized between India and Pakistan, I have always been acutely conscious that Akbar Jehan's and Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's espousal of the right of self-determination for the people of Jammu and Kashmir and their opposition to the partition of India along religious lines made them persona non grata in the two young nation-states. That is the reason I was intrigued and taken aback to see a validation of the Sheikh's courage in the face of adversity from an unlikely source, Sardar Ibrahim Khan.

Sardar Ibrahim Khan was President of Pakistan Administered "Azad" Kashmir from 1947 to 1950, 1957 to 1959, and 1975 to 1977. In his book published in 1965, Khan did not dither in eulogizing the Sheikh. He observes that Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah had remained in incarceration for more than ten years. During that precarious period, "he bore insult and humiliation with courage and steadfastness. He stood by his convictions." Sardar emphasizes that no offer of material and financial benefit, or of a luxurious life, could tempt the Sheikh to alter "his stand on the question of the inalienable right of the people of Kashmir vis-à-vis the question of plebiscite." His family suffered tremendous deprivations and harassment in the face of the Sheikh's resolute political stance. Akbar Jehan and her children, Sardar regretfully says, "bore insults and privation. They all stood firm and faced the might of the Government of India for twelve years or so" (34). The role that Akbar Jehan and the Sheikh played in creating a political consciousness among the people of Jammu and Kashmir, particularly the Muslims of the state, can be critically analyzed but cannot be wished away nor can it be erased from the annals of history. The havoc caused during this torrential phase of the history of Kashmir is borne out by the testimonies of several people, which should be documented.

One such testimony is that of Iftikhar Ahmad, the oldest of Akbar Jehan's and Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's grandchildren. Iftikhar, who

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was old enough at the time to be buffeted by the political torrent, enriches Suraiya's reminiscences and echoes some of her recollections. He affectionately recalls that Akbar Jehan was very particular about her children's education and would push him to excel academically, so he could avail himself of the myriad political, sociocultural, and economic forums that a good education can create. Some wounds, however, remain unhealed, and he has harrowing memories of that period: "Times were very difficult, and our resources were skimpy. Even physicians were afraid to come to our house to treat a sick person." He, like his aunt, Suraiya, remembers with gratitude and affection "the only physician who, in spite of having been threatened by Prime Minister Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, would visit the house on a regular basis to ensure that we were doing well. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to Dr. Hafizullah, a soft-spoken gem of a person, who, unfortunately, died in a plane crash in 1966." Iftikhar assertively says that in the Sheikh's absence, Akbar Jehan became the rallying force against "the dictatorial and undemocratic Indian administration of Kashmir" (e-mail from Iftikhar Ahmad to author, January 31, 2012).

She intrepidly and valorously led protest marches against Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad's puppet regime on several occasions and "faced the full wrath of the government, including baton charges and getting doused by water cannons. I remember that back then the authorities, instead of water deluges, would use human waste to disperse the protestors." In a voice cracking with emotion, Iftikhar observes that despite the terrible hurdles in her way, Akbar Jehan fought the good fight (Ibid.). It cannot be hard for a relatively objective observer to admit, even one who might disagree with Akbar Jehan's politics, that despite her forbearance, quiet strength, and unbuckling conviction, she was sorely tried.

Akbar Jehan was subject to familial strictures and responsibilities: care for children, maintaining and enhancing the vibrancy of her husband's political mission, remaining steadfast and resilient in the midst of persecution, dispossession, and relocation. It would be a reasonable inference that she did not define herself in terms of a niche, because the landscape that she moved through was in a state of constant flux. Akbar Jehan's survival entailed a constant battle with the power apparatus and the social apparatus, which were built on a monolithic hierarchy and were opposed to the growth of a collective political consciousness. In order to meet new challenges head on, she, unlike a lot of woman of her culture and generation, reconstructed and redirected her life. Seasoned journalist Ajit Bhattacharjea observes, "When freed of her domestic chores, Akbar Jahan [sic] developed the personality

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latent in her. ... She was regarded as being even more committed to securing Kashmir's autonomy than her husband. Known in the Valley as 'Madr-e-Meharban' (kind mother), she was to be accused by the Intelligence Bureau of having links with Pakistan in the final conspiracy case filed against her husband and his associates" (43–44).

In anticipation of the reader's bewilderment at the reference to the "conspiracy case," I had collected bits and pieces about the troubled period after the Sheikh's arrest and the strategy deployed by the Intelligence Bureau of India in collusion with the government of Jammu and Kashmir to frame not just the Sheikh, but Akbar Jehan as well. I vaguely knew that in order to justify Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's undemocratic dismissal and incarceration, he was labeled a Pakistani agent and allegations of receiving large sums of money from the government of Pakistan were leveled against him. Akbar Jehan was accused of being the conduit through whom the Sheikh purportedly received "illegal funding" for "espionage activities."

In an attempt to negate criticism of the barbaric methods deployed to muzzle Akbar Jehan and the Sheikh, the then premier of Jammu and Kashmir, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, in a show of preposterous cunning, contradicted himself. His doublespeak, however, was not lost on neutral observers. After the Sheikh's re-arrest in May 1958 and the leveling of unsubstantiated allegations against him, Akbar Jehan, and their colleagues, the correspondent of *The Times of London* reported that the news of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's arrest had come as a complete surprise, and people were taken aback at the audacity of the imprisonment. The correspondent tells his readers that the official statement issued by the government of Jammu and Kashmir to justify the Sheikh's arrest was that "his remaining at liberty would be 'hazardous to the security of the State.'" This statement, the correspondent notes, contradicted "the confident claim made by the Prime Minister, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, to your correspondent less than a week ago that Sheikh Abdullah's release had completely failed to disturb peace and order" (May 1, 1958).

The Correspondent of *The Times of London* expressly tells the readers that while he was delving into the political turnabouts and reversals of policy and opinion in Jammu and Kashmir, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, prior to his re-arrest, was leading an ostensibly quiet and austere life, "seldom leaving his house except for occasional appearances at public prayers. He declared that he had no intention of engaging directly in any political activity for the time being, as he did not wish to embarrass the

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Security Council in its effort to find an agreed solution to the Kashmir problem ... " (Ibid.). Although the Indian nation-state used all the apparatuses at its command, political, judicial, and military, to muzzle the people's yearning for the right of self-determination and a democratic dispensation, Akbar Jehan worked hard to advance the political agenda of the Plebiscite Front, while maintaining a low profile.

My impressions regarding the Sheikh's arrest and the Kashmir Conspiracy Case became more coherent after reading the monograph by Y. D. Gundevia. Gundevia was Special Secretary handling Kashmir Affairs in the United Nations, then Commonwealth Secretary handling Kashmir Affairs, and Jawaharlal Nehru's Foreign Secretary, all in the 1960s. Gundevia's monograph is appended with *The Testament of Sheikh Abdullah* (1974). I quote portions of Gundevia's astute observation about the Sheikh's ouster and arrest in 1953. Gundevia observes that the Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir [Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah], at this stage, was contending with the rabidity "of Muslim communalism of the pro-Pakistan variety and Hindu communalism of the strongly entrenched Praja Parishad (today's Bharatiya Janata Party, a right-wing ultra-nationalist organization) in Jammu." The increasing communalization of Indian politics was a juggernaut that questioned the myth of secularism in India, and the increasing religiosity in Pakistan was just as damaging. Punitive measures taken against Muslim communalists were welcomed with quiet sighs of relief and approval in India, but any attempt to crack down on the divisive politics of the ultra-nationalist, right-wing Praja Parishad met with strong denunciation.

Gundevia quotes B. N. Mullick [Director of the Intelligence Bureau in the Ministry of Home Affairs, 1953], who was, by no means, sympathetic toward the Sheikh's cause. Mullick observed, " 'If anything accelerated the final break between Sheikh Abdullah and India, it was the Praja Parishad's agitation in the winter of 1952–1953 in Jammu Province over the demand for the full integration of Jammu and Kashmir with India on the basis of one Constitution, one flag and one President.' " The Praja Parishad's demand for unconditional integration of the state into the Indian Union would have entailed the negation of the Instrument of Accession, the subsequent Delhi Agreement [of 1952] and Article 370.[1]

1 The negotiations in June and July 1952 between a delegation of the Jammu and Kashmir government led by Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and Mirza Afzal Beg, and a delegation of the Indian government led by Jawaharlal Nehru resulted in the Delhi Agreement, which reinforced the autonomous status of J & K.

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These legal and constitutional provisions ensured that, except for the areas of Defense, Foreign Affairs, and Communications, the Indian Parliament would require the concurrence of the legislative assembly of Jammu and Kashmir to apply any law to the state.

Gundevia goes on to observe that the Ministry of Home Affairs in India wasn't content with the incarceration of the Sheikh and the suppression of his political activities. In order to legitimize the crackdown on the political consciousness of Kashmir, the Ministry of Home Affairs [India] in collusion with the Intelligence Bureau conspired to criminalize the political activities of the Sheikh and Akbar Jehan. So, employing diabolic political statecraft, "the story put out was that the Sheikh had been receiving large sums of money from Pakistan and that he had gone to Gulmarg (with his wife and children) on the night of his arrest to contact important Pakistan agents—or, to make it even more dramatic, did he intend going over, bodily, to Pakistan?" But, as Gundevia notes in his testimony, such intimidation did not daunt the Sheikh, who, "however, featured in a further complaint that was filed on October 23, five months later [1958]." Surprisingly, "the Begum Saheba [Akbar Jehan] was never charged and never brought to book. One would have thought that she would be the principal accused, with hundreds of letters said to be in the hands of the prosecution, 'proving' that [she was complicit]" (111–112; 113; 116).

Gundevia's deconstruction of the infamous Kashmir Conspiracy Case of 1958 places the Intelligence Bureau of India, the Ministry of Home Affairs [India], and the government of Jammu and Kashmir, headed by Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, in the scrutinizing public glare. The testimony of the then Director of the Intelligence Bureau, Mullick, during the Kashmir Conspiracy Case and the attempted indictment of Akbar Jehan further accentuates the employment of cunning and duplicity in statecraft. Mullick astutely points out that Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad [Prime Minister of the state during the Kashmir Conspiracy Case] announced that even if the allegation leveled against Akbar Jehan [Begum Abdullah] could be substantiated, he would hesitate from agreeing to her prosecution. "Muslim opinion," Mullick notes, "in Kashmir valley would not excuse him from dragging this lady, who was known as 'Madr-e-Meharban,' to the courts" (qtd. in Gundevia 86–94).

Mullick, in his intransigence and determination to close the chapter of Kashmiri self-determination and autonomy, argued that without Akbar Jehan in the trial the prosecution would be unable to corroborate the

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charge of seditious conspiracy leveled against her, the Sheikh, and their political colleagues. He insisted that without the prosecution of Akbar Jehan, they would "miss one of the main connecting links with Pakistan and this would greatly weaken our case; but on this question Bakshi would not budge; and Pandit Nehru [Prime Minister of India] also agreed that the Sheikh should not be prosecuted." The Intelligence Bureau and the Ministry of Home Affairs [India] were in a state of perplexity and uncertainty over how to proceed in this rather difficult situation, because they had moved mountains to prepare a "proper charge-sheet." But, to their utter dismay, they were categorically told that "he [Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah] should not be put on trial." The Intelligence Bureau, however, persevered, in its attempt to bring Akbar Jehan and the Sheikh to book. Not one to be easily slighted, Mullick disparagingly goes on to note, "when the case opened, he [Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah] would address the court in commanding tones, assumed a haughty posture, and said he would expose the prosecutors" (Ibid.).

If, as the prosecution claimed, Akbar Jehan was indeed complicit in her husband's pro-Pakistan "espionage activities," why did the government of India not indict her? Historically, governments have not been deterred from indicting and prosecuting those considered "criminals" by respect for the gender or maternal obligations of the accused. Mullick's vitriolic outbursts, rancor, and vicious endeavors to vindicate the unwarranted incarceration of the Sheikh and his political colleagues proved futile, as Prime Minister Nehru was averse to detaining a leader against whom no substantive evidence could be garnered. The evidence fabricated by Mullick and his cohort was fragmented, contradictory, and could not hold water. India, a young nation-state in the late fifties and early sixties, sought the approval of the international community and could not brook the corrosive criticisms of world powers and intergovernmental organizations.

During the ignominious Kashmir Conspiracy Case, the Ministry of Home Affairs [India] and its intelligence agencies worked assiduously to not just indict Akbar Jehan, the Sheikh, and their trusted colleagues, but to get them harshly convicted as well. While attempting in brilliant legalese to counter the allegations leveled at the leader, Mirza Afzal Beg, the Sheikh's confidant and loyal lieutenant, distressingly recounts that every word the Sheikh spoke after his unlawful arrest in 1953 and his rearrest in 1958 was held against him and misconstrued as treasonous. He quotes verbatim the Sheikh's poignant conversation with his children

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when they visited him in jail, where they mourned their loss of home, their father's guiding presence, and society:

> *Surat siraf yih hai ki aapko Khuda tala par bharosa hona chahiye, aapko Khuda tala par yakin hona chahiye, wohi behtrin madadgar hai. Jis ko is baat par yakin hai who haq ka daman kabhi nahin chhoor sakta. Main ne kaha ki who baat mujh par lazim nahin hai jo Khuda tala ke kehne ke khilaf ho. Main ne jail qabool kiya magar sachai ka daman na chhora.* (Quoted in Beg, 37)
>
> You must have unflinching faith and trust in God. Whoever believes that there is no one to turn to but God will always fight for truth. It would not behoove me to defy God's will. I have accepted incarceration, but will not disavow the truth. (The translation is mine.)

Beg, in his eloquent defense of the Sheikh and Akbar Jehan, pointed out, "Now, Sir, he is describing his own tale to his children. Does it amount to spreading hatred against the Government? ... If a father tells his children: Depend on God if you have no home to live in, depend on God if you have no bread to eat in the evening, does it mean that he is indirectly telling them to annex the State to Pakistan?" (Beg 38). The sarcasm in Beg's persuasive appeal cannot be lost on a discerning reader. It might be hard to comprehend the vicissitudes of the lives of political personages who have dedicated themselves to a cause, but in the world of realpolitik, idealists and visionaries continue to be besieged by adversities.

Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's release in January 1958, after an ignoble incarceration of four-and-a-half years, was welcomed by the populace of Kashmir with an unbounded ebullience, which was marvelously delineated in *Time*, January 20, 1958. In a sensory description of the Sheikh's release, the correspondent of the *Time* writes, "At week's end Sheikh Abdullah, wearing a long black funeral-black *achkan* [long coat] over loose white pajamas, held on to the windshield of his jeep and waved to crowds lining the road and jamming the towns along the way as he rode to the capital at the head of a 30-car caravan." The summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir, Srinagar, wore a jubilant and convivial look on that occasion. Such was his charisma, as the correspondent observes, "When the Sheikh appeared on the balcony of a Moslem shrine, and people prostrated themselves in a heap below, crying vows that they would lay down their lives for him." From the corridors of power, Prime Minister Bakshi blustered that his government had preempted any effort to revive the issue of self-determination for Jammu and Kashmir. He declared that

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"his police would tolerate no challenge to law and order in 'this border state of the Indian Union.'"

On April 22, 1958, the Special Correspondent of *The Times* of London wrote that although the Sheikh's support system had been greatly weakened by the detention of his "principal colleagues and supporters" and by the strict system of surveillance that had been put into place to monitor his movements, he remained a force to contend with. The force of his personality, the correspondent observed, inspired devotion in the people and was "enough to deprive the present Kashmir Government of all peace of mind. Yet one cannot imprison a man indefinitely because he is admired and loved; nor presumably maintain in office a Government if it is unable to make itself either."

Not one to be staved off by world opinion, Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad concurred with the claim of the Intelligence Bureau and the Ministry of Home Affairs that the government had sufficient evidence to indict Akbar Jehan, the Sheikh, and their associates. He, however, cunningly claimed that the government would not bring them to trial, as that would encourage the dissemination of "Pakistani propaganda" and "other anti-Indian forces," which the puppet premier would not brook. He audaciously reiterated the uncorroborated charge that the Sheikh had been the recipient of funds from Pakistan to, allegedly, fund the upkeep of "private forces of volunteers." Bakshi, outrageously, contradicted himself when he accused the Sheikh of inciting subversive acts to disrupt public order, and right after confidently stated, "the situation in Kashmir was absolutely normal and that there had been no demonstrations worth mentioning in protest against the rearrest" (*The Times*, May 6, 1958). Ironically, the rearrest of the Sheikh created a constituency for his and Akbar Jehan's politics in those parts of the world that had lent moral support to India's glorious struggle for freedom in 1947.

An acclaimed American commentator profoundly noted, "It is ironic that the Lion of Kashmir [Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah] who fought so long for freedom has been jailed again by a freedom-loving state. The Lion exemplifies the spirit of Thoreau, who said, 'I was not born to be forced. Freedom isn't something to be won and then forgotten. It must be renewed like soil after yielding good crops'" (Murrow, in broadcast over *CBS Radio Network,* May 1, 1958). Kashmir, despite all claims to the contrary, was an "irreducible particularity" that "posed a question" in the experiment of nation-building in the partitioned Indian subcontinent (Devji 2013).

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The Chicago Daily Tribune was just as unequivocal in its criticism of the Sheikh's detention as other international commentators and political analysts. The editorial in the *Tribune* underlined that the Sheikh's arrest was under the Nehru government's Preventive Detention Act, which gave Indian authorities free rein to hold a suspect for a period of up to ten years without either lodging formal charges or a formal warrant. The Sheikh, the editorial explained to its readers, had been "making himself unpopular by demanding that the people of Kashmir be permitted to decide their own future by a plebiscite." It further noted that the significant and exemplary role played by the Sheikh in India's freedom struggle and the arduous work of nation-building had won him disapprobation from the British authorities. In the days of British rule, the Sheikh's "record of arrests rivals that of Nehru himself." The editorial observed that in a recent letter to Nehru, the Sheikh had drawn an analogy between a Nazi concentration camp and the political morbidity in the Valley of Kashmir. He had also expressed his consternation at the halted march toward democracy after political stalwarts in the Indian subcontinent had campaigned and fought against the British colonial power. The commentator concludes, "All that has happened is that Abdullah has become a martyr in the cause of liberty under Britain's heir" (May 5, 1958). It did not take a skeptic to question whether articles in newly ratified constitutions of sovereign nations, which pledged to protect the fundamental rights of citizens, had a real impact on institution building.

Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah had been arrested for "his political leaning which runs counter to the Government of India in Kashmir. ... Sheikh Abdullah was never known for resorting to or even calling for violence; all that he had called for was that the people of Kashmir should be given their just right and that they should not be oppressed" (*Al-Zaman*, May 7, 1958). Standing strong in the face of formidable opposition, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah forcefully countered the allegation of breach of pledge leveled against him by the government of India in 1953 and later in 1958. He, firmly and forthrightly, repudiated the allegation and stated that maintaining the solemnity and sanctity of a pledge is not the responsibility of just one side. He asserted, "When the charge of the breach of faith is, leveled against me, I have a right to pose the question as to where lies the responsibility for not implementing the promises and assurances given by the Government of India to the State of Jammu and Kashmir from the date of the tribal raid until my arrest in 1953" (Abdullah, "Breach of Pledge," 31–32).

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Despite the myriad attempts of their detractors to disparage and censure them, the Sheikh, Akbar Jehan, and their associates did not desist from trying to find a solution to the Kashmir conflict, which would be in accordance with "the freedom struggle of Kashmir and the independence movement of the Indian people" (Abdullah, "The Kashmiri Viewpoint," 41). They sought to find a practical solution to the deadlock that would enable preservation of peace in the Indian subcontinent, while maintaining the honor of everyone concerned. For the dreams that they nurtured, for the political idealism that they cherished, for the political and economic objectives that they sought to fulfill, and for the communal amity that they worked hard to preserve, they had to endure painful and difficult situations, as political activists and as companions.

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6
Banishment and Trauma

Abstract: *On May 7, 1965, Akbar Jehan and the Sheikh returned to India after having performed Haj, the obligatory pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia. On their arrival they were greeted with an arrest warrant under the Defense of India Rules, banished from Jammu and Kashmir, and exiled to Kodaikanal in South India. Ironically, the seemingly interminable incarceration of the Sheikh by the government of India had allayed the hostility of the Pakistani establishment toward him. The Pakistani Foreign Minister in 1965, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, took it upon himself to extol the virtues and services of the Sheikh at the United Nations General Assembly, with the son of Akbar Jehan and the Sheikh, Tariq Abdullah, in tow.*

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I decided that the best way to represent my subject was through recollections and testimonies of some of her family members. I asked them questions about the happenings that I was interested in, enabling me to create the source materials which will further my inquiry. One's understanding of history is enriched by the historical interpretations and versions of events of living historical and political actors.

Akbar Jehan accompanied her husband and Mirza Afzal Beg on the *Haj* pilgrimage to the cities of Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia in 1965. Subsequent to the submission of the Sheikh's application to the government of India for permission to go to *Haj*, Gundevia reminds the reader that Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah identified himself as a "Kashmiri Muslim" on his passport. Originally, the passport had been endorsed just for Pakistan, but before he left for his religious pilgrimage, it was endorsed for several countries: "Sheikh Abdullah accompanied by his wife and Mirza Afzal Beg left Bombay in the first week of March on what turned out to be quite a tour of Europe and other countries, which was to end with the pilgrimage to Mecca" (*Testament* 132).

It was on the tour taken with Akbar Jehan and Beg that Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah made a trip to Algiers where he met the Chinese premier, Chou En-lai, whose antipathy toward India was an open secret and whose anti-India campaign had become even more vociferous in the wake of the 1962 Indo-China war. Gundevia recalls that when he asked the Sheikh why he had chosen to court the displeasure of New Delhi by meeting with Chou En-lai, the Sheikh "innocently" replied, "I did not ask to see him. Chou En-lai sent me an invitation, so I went and saw him. What was wrong with that? After all, Kashmir has a common border with China, hasn't it?" Gundavia then goes on to sympathetically speculate, "That simple, it was, and I am sure he still looks at it with the same simplicity. But how many people outside Jammu and Kashmir are prepared to call him 'innocent' and 'simple'?" (*Testament* 133). Subsequent to this much publicized meeting, mainstream Indian politicians expressly voiced their antipathy to the politics of the Sheikh and demanded that he be asked to return to the country without further delay.

Mainstream Indian politicians considered it culpable that the Sheikh had accepted Chou En-lai's invitation to visit China, India's arch foe at the time. On being told that his passport would expire on April 30, 1965, the Sheikh took the initiative of writing to the then Prime Minister of India, Lal Bahadur Shastri, informing him that Akbar Jehan, Mirza Afzal Beg, and he would be unable to complete the obligatory *Haj* rituals by then and

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would require more time to fulfill their religious obligations. The letter was sent to the Indian embassy in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. However, Prime Minister Shastri claimed that he never received the letter (Abdullah and Gundevia, *Testament*, 134). On May 7, 1965, Akbar Jehan and the Sheikh returned to India, where they were greeted with an arrest warrant under the Defense of India Rules and exiled to Kodaikanal in South India. Not only were they removed from their home, loved ones, supporters, but their physical movements were restricted to the municipal limits of the tiny town in the low mountains of the Indian subcontinent.

The Sheikh's younger daughter, whom the reader is already familiar with, Suraiya Ali Matto née Abdullah, poignantly recalls the period of her parents' political banishment and exile. Akbar Jehan and the Sheikh asked their younger daughter to join them in Kodaikanal, a place hitherto unknown to her, in 1965. "My father," she recounts, "had been banished to this South Indian town soon after his return from the Haj pilgrimage along with my mother." Kodaikanal is in Tamil Nadu, and back then it was known not just for being a tourist resort but also for its good missionary schools to which children from elite families were sent. Akbar Jehan, the Sheikh, and Suraiya were lodged in an old, well-preserved manor house of an erstwhile *nawab* [nobleman], called Koh-i-Noor. The three of them were given the uppermost apartment; the basement and the ground floor were occupied by security officials and guards. Suraiya recollects that the authorities grudgingly allowed her father some mobility within the small town, which had a golf course, a lake, and a shopping mall. The luxurious tourist hotels were situated around the lake, and every evening they would go out for long walks either around the lake or on the golf course (Conversation with author, November 21, 2009).

With a yearning in her voice and a despondent look on her face, she says, "My father was a strict disciplinarian who stuck to his regimen—studying Tamil in the mornings; indulging in his favorite pastime, cooking, in which he was assisted by my mother, Akbar Jehan, and at times by me. Reading newspapers regularly, listening to the radio or television news, and reading good books became his daily routine." The Sheikh, notes his younger daughter, was a deeply religious man, said his prayers five times a day and recited the Quran, which became his routine. His punctuality, discipline, and regularity saved him from either going insane or being afflicted by depression, except once (Ibid.).

She pensively tells me that all three of them had more or less adjusted themselves to their "God forsaken prison," where anyone who was cordial

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toward them was regarded as a suspect by the security personnel who followed them like shadows wherever we went. Akbar Jehan, the Sheikh, and Suraiya were monitored so closely that none of them had access to the telephone which had been installed for the security officials, and letters addressed to any of them were censored. The claustrophobic environment in Kodaikanal was so morose and dismal that they "were on the verge of giving up hope of papa ever being released from Kodaikanal." Suraiya's eyes well up when she tells me that one morning the Sheikh complained of a parched throat and fatigue. "Lately, he had started eating candies and mangoes." He would be despondent and dispirited, especially when feelings of persecution set in, and he thought that he was being subjected to slow poisoning. His condition was reported to the government of India by the District Collector, T. N. Seshan, who later became the 10th Chief Election Commissioner of India (Ibid.).

Various tests were conducted on the Sheikh by the doctors. The results absolutely shocked the doctors—his blood sugar had crossed the danger mark. That is when he was shifted to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, where he was kept for nearly three months. Subsequently, he was moved to 3 Kotla Lane in New Delhi. Eventually, the government of India, led by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, initiated diplomatic negotiations with him, supposedly, for a viable resolution to the Kashmir conflict. "The rest," as Suraiya says, "is history." "Papa," she says unhesitatingly, "remained clear headed about his political ideology during his time in exile and even until he breathed his last. All that while my mother stood like a rock beside him. Not once did she try to weaken his resolve" (Ibid.).

The Sheikh's youngest son, Mustafa Kamal, remembers that period with clarity. He remembers that Akbar Jehan spent every day of the two years that the Sheikh was exiled in Kodaikanal by his side. Mustafa had spent a few weeks with them there. He solemnly remarks that they would take regular walks from the house to the small lake and even take a ride in the row boat with an officer in civilian clothes, a LMP doctor (Licentiate Medical Practitioner), in attendance. He remembers that one evening, while offering the evening prayer (*Magrib*), the Sheikh could not get up and lay prostrate. The registered medical practitioner was called immediately. It was discovered that he had high blood sugar, enough to cause a comatose condition. He was flown to Delhi with the doctor giving him insulin every few minutes. At the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, his condition was stabilized, but he remained, for

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the rest of his life, a case of Diabetes Mellitus type II. The Sheikh had also developed osteoarthritis of both knees, a condition in which pain and swelling of the knees occurs. The licensed medical practitioner at Kodaikanal had put him on the front line pain killer of the time combined with prednisolone, a corticosteroid drug, "Delta- Butazolidine." The Delta part, that is, steroid, triggered diabetes for which the Sheikh was pre-disposed due to a sedentary lifestyle and weight (e-mail to author, February 6, 2012).

Mustafa goes on to observe, "it was during that secluded, lonely, and traumatic period that Father began dictating his political narrative and the trajectory of his life to Suraiya, which later became part of his auto/biography, *Atish-e-Chinar* or *The Blazing Chinar*. All through the persecution, psychological lacerations, and imprisonment, Mummy held her head high and never kowtowed to those who were responsible for our plight." He tenderly recounts that Akbar Jehan was a very good cook and had taught him how to cook when she spent some time with him in Tangmarg, where he was posted as a doctor by the government, and, he claims that the training that she gave him then has stood him in good stead till today. While exhorting her younger son, she would remind him that worldly life was ephemeral and that it was better to wear out than to rust out (Ibid).

The terrible impact that the seemingly unending incarceration of a father, who has the steadfastness to stand by his principles in an unforgiving political climate, can have on the psyche of a child manifested itself in the Sheikh's and Akbar Jehan's second son, Tariq. Tariq had been named after "Tariq-bin-Ziyad, the renowned Muslim conqueror of Morocco, who lit the torch of Islam, which dispelled the darkness of Europe" (Abdullah, *The Blazing Chinar,* 141). About Tariq, the Sheikh says, "When I lay in prison, he travelled across Europe fighting for the cause of Kashmir" (Ibid).

In the guileful and wily world of subcontinental politics, Tariq Abdullah became just another pawn who was chosen to accompany the Pakistani delegation to the United Nations General Assembly in 1965, which was supposedly committed to pleading the Kashmir cause. After much probing and digging, I found the text of the speech that Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, then Foreign Minister of Pakistan, had delivered at the United Nations General Assembly. I also succeeded in excavating the text of Tariq Abdullah's testimony that he had read out on the same occasion, which had led the government of India to label him as persona non grata.

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Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, uncharacteristically, expressed great solicitude for the Sheikh, who, he noted, "in the eighteen years of our independence, has been incarcerated for eleven years or more by India. After the independence of India, this great comrade of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, this great symbol of the freedom movement, has been rotting in Indian gaols [sic] for more than a decade." In contradiction of the earlier stance of successive governments of Pakistan against the Kashmiri nationalist, Bhutto vehemently insisted that the only true representative of the Kashmiri people was Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, "the man who has waged a heroic struggle for the people of Jammu and Kashmir from 1931 onwards, ... a person who was a hero and a symbol of his people, a person who symbolized freedom and the struggle for emancipation." He bemoans, "that great hero, who symbolized freedom, is today in an Indian gaol [sic]." In his signature oratorical style, Bhutto vociferously demanded the release of the imprisoned leader, "We say: Release Sheikh Abdullah, the acknowledged leader of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, and let the world hear what he has to say about the future of the State of Jammu and Kashmir" (Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's Speech, United Nations General Assembly, October 15, 1965).

Tariq Abdullah made an impassioned plea for his father's release from unlawful detention and drew attention to the chicanery of Machiavellian politicians, who had "ensnared and entrapped" his father. He eloquently said that his father had always condemned intolerance and fanaticism, and that under his leadership Kashmir had preserved communal amity, even during the brutal and rabidly bigoted period of the Partition of India. He pointed out that the Sheikh's unequivocal endorsement of the ideals of secularism was a much known fact. But, Tariq observed, a nation-state could not stifle a people's legitimate aspirations under the aegis of secularism (Tariq Abdullah's Speech, United Nations General Assembly, October 15, 1965).

Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, Tariq told the Assembly, had "warned Mr. Nehru from 1952 onwards that India was following a disastrous policy in Kashmir ... ." In 1953, when the Sheikh had "publicly stated his view that the future of India, Pakistan, and Kashmir could not be secure without an honorable settlement of the Kashmir dispute, he was deposed and put in gaol [sic]. For a long time no legal proceedings were brought against him. When a case was filed, it dragged on for several years." Although the Sheikh was acquitted in 1964, he did not remain at liberty for long and was taken into custody, yet again, in 1965. Tariq

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lamented, "Since early this year he has been kept in detention without trial" (Ibid.). Ironically, the seemingly interminable incarceration of the Sheikh by the government of India had allayed the hostility of the Pakistani establishment toward him. The Pakistani Foreign Minister in 1965, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, took it upon himself to extol the virtues and services of the Sheikh at the United Nations General Assembly, with Tariq Abdullah in tow.

The Sheikh touchingly admits in his auto/ biography that because of his political perseverance and commitment, his children had been deprived of a father's counsel, which he regretted. His inability to spend sufficient time with his children and guide them through the entangled web of life had created an incommensurable vacuum in their young lives. He appreciatively notes, "It is my wife's commitment and her able management which enabled my children to carry on with their education as far as they could, despite heavy odds" (*The Blazing Chinar*, 139).

Akbar Jehan's solicitude for her son Tariq spoke volumes about her anguish at his disenchantment and agony, which remained unmitigated till the day he died in 2006. The persistent efforts of the governments of India and Pakistan to stifle his father and misconstrue his father's politics and Tariq's pigeonholing as an "objectionable person" by the government of India, subsequent to his appearance at the United Nations General Assembly with Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, left him paranoid, raging, and unsettled. Tariq's inability to come to terms with the realities of life, some of which were disagreeable, caused him to be filled with a fury and an acrimony that wouldn't subside. I am inclined to believe that Tariq's dreadful mental agony remained a source of disquietude for Akbar Jehan her entire life.

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7

Significance of Alliances and Shifting Balance of Power

Abstract: *The significance of Akbar Jehan's role on the political landscape of Kashmir remained undiminished in the days to come. After the parliamentary election of 1971 in which she had campaigned for a political novice supported by the Plebiscite Front, her political acumen and clout were feared by the opposition. Subsequently, she, specifically, was officially banned from entering the state. Perhaps it was her proclivity to not seek personal credit for the accomplishment that not many political analysts have delved into her work in the parliamentary elections of 1971 and later in the state assembly elections of 1977.*

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I foreground the relation of Akbar Jehan to the era in which she lived, which is a recognition of the politics of the age. My attempt is to not interpret history through the subjective lens of contemporary politics.

Akbar Jehan again found herself in the vanguard after her husband's release from jail in 1968, which was greeted with overwhelming jubilation in the Kashmir Valley. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah was welcomed by the populace with such uninhibited exuberance and joy that the foundations of the Congress, now led by Jawaharlal Nehru's daughter, Indira Gandhi, in the Valley were palpably shaken. Soon after his release the Sheikh addressed a mammoth gathering in Anantnag in which he unhesitatingly voiced his dissident ideology. He made it clear that the Indian state's undemocratic and oppressive tactics would not inhibit the passionate desire of the Kashmiri people for a democratic dispensation. He also reminded the governments of India and Pakistan of their unfulfilled promise to hold a plebiscite in Kashmir and enable the people to exercise their right of self-determination.

On January 26, 1968, the Sheikh's disillusionment with Indian democracy created further political and personal acrimony. He intrepidly reminded the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the government of India that the Indian Constitution sought to guarantee an independent judiciary, an honest electoral process, and rule of law. Extolling the integrity and probity of the Indian Constitution, the Sheikh noted, "It is not surprising that many other countries have drawn upon this constitution, particularly the chapter on fundamental rights." He reminded his audience that the constitution provided a strong framework, and it was for those who were responsible for the smooth functioning of institutional mechanisms of government to implement constitutional provisions, so they impacted institutions (*Speeches and Interviews of Sher-e-Kashmir* 15–16; quoted in Bose 46).

The Sheikh expressed regret and disappointment that the provisions of the Indian Constitution had been blatantly violated in Kashmir, "and the ideals it enshrines completely forgotten. Forces have arisen which threaten to carry this saddening and destructive process further still" (Ibid.). In the wake of armed insurrection in 1989, exoduses, state-sponsored atrocities, extortions, and militant violence the Sheikh's prediction proved frighteningly accurate. The Sheikh's sharply drawn delineation of anti-democratic strategies deployed by the government of India in Jammu and Kashmir and the detrimental consequences of restricting political space has proved to be the prognosis of a visionary.

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In the subsequent years, some interesting political developments occurred in the state, which had prodigious political implications for Akbar Jehan and the Sheikh. The Plebiscite Front, which had maintained its oppositional and dissident stance toward policies of the government of India in Jammu and Kashmir, proclaimed its intention to contest parliamentary elections scheduled in 1971 and elections to the legislative assembly scheduled in 1972. In January 1971, Mirza Afzal Beg was on his way to Kashmir from New Delhi by road, and the Sheikh and Shah were scheduled to fly to the Valley from the capital city. The flight that the Sheikh and Shah should have been on was cancelled because of a bomb hoax, leaving them with no choice but to remain in New Delhi and wait for the next available flight. Unbeknownst to them, the Ministry of Home Affairs of the government of India had surreptitiously decided to detain them in New Delhi for an indefinite period. That evening they were served with banishment orders, preventing them from reentering Jammu and Kashmir. Beg was stopped on his way to the Valley and peremptorily told to turn back.

In addition to the top brass of the aforementioned Plebiscite Front being confined to New Delhi, several members of the organization were arrested under the Preventive Detention Act implemented in the state. Subsequent to the large-scale arrests of the leaders and members of the Plebiscite Front, elections were held in the state in 1971–1972 in which the Indira Gandhi-led Congress orchestrated a landslide victory for itself, managing to secure five of six parliamentary seats and fifty-seven of seventy-five Assembly seats. I, again, quote Gundevia who observes regarding the Sheikh's banishment, "...when Sheikh Abdullah threatens to fight an election, for the first time in years, he is banished from Kashmir, obviously because of the fear that he would not lose his deposit—and the other side might" (142).

In an e-mail (dated April 12, 2008) to me, reinforcing Gundevia's contention, G. M. Shah wrote that in the winter of 1970, his mother-in-law, Akbar Jehan, his wife, Khalida, sister-in-law, Suraiya, and his daughter, Aaliya, went to Delhi to spend some time with "Sher-i-Kashmir" [Lion of Kashmir], in an attempt to provide the detainee with some semblance of home and family. He recounts, "In January 1971, after Sher-e-Kashmir Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, Mirza Afzal Beg, and I were served with orders banishing us from Jammu and Kashmir, workers of the Plebiscite Front came out in overwhelming numbers in the Valley and protested against the unconstitutional action of the government of India and the

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stooge government in Jammu and Kashmir." Akbar Jehan, Shah told me, was officially banished from the state subsequent to the parliamentary election in 1971. They remained in exile for three-and-a-half years. The revocation of the banishment order in 1974 caused their supporters to celebrate with an inextinguishable zeal, and the return of the Sheikh, Akbar Jehan, Mirza Afzal Beg, and G. M. Shah to the valley was observed with unfettered enthusiasm and rejoicing, manifesting a democratic aversion to the despotic abuse of authority.

Here, I take the liberty of interspersing a personal detail with the historical and political narrative: although the government of India vouchsafed permission to the Sheikh to attend my parents' *nikaah* ceremony (ceremony of the ratification of the Sunni Muslim marriage contract, witnessed by the families of the bride and the groom) in 1970, the authorities did not display the same magnanimity in 1971, when he was disallowed from attending the *Rukhsati* (the final sending off ceremony of the bride from her natal home to the home of her groom and in-laws). The vacuum created, then, by the absence of her father at one of the most significant milestones of her life was deplored and mourned by my mother, Suraiya. The Sheikh always regretted not having got enough time with his youngest child, Suraiya, because, since her birth he had been severely penalized by the Indian state for his political rebellion and had faced unremitting prison terms. He bemoaned his powerlessness in the face of tyrannical mechanisms of state power. He poignantly expressed, "One can imagine the susceptibilities of a father whose beloved daughter's marriage is being celebrated but who is kept away from his home and denied the joy of touching with affection the head of his daughter and of bidding her adieu" (*The Blazing Chinar* 141).

Mother's once unspeakable grief at the helplessness that paralyzes a person when the state machinery is deployed to clip his wings has now mellowed. She remembers, with an incurable ache, that the political stalwarts who sought to assume paternal duties at the *Rukhsati* were Maulana Mohammad Sayeed Masoodi, Ghulam Mohiuddin Karra, and Kashyap Bandhu, all of whom had fought shoulder to shoulder with her father in the creation of a political and socioeconomic space for the people of the state in the despotic environment of the thirties and forties. My parents, Suraiya and Mohammad Ali Matto, tell me that Akbar Jehan did not allow the void created by the absence of the Sheikh at their wedding to put a dampener on the ceremony. The Sheikh had "requested the government to allow" him "to attend, but the authorities

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were insensitive." He was aware that he "could go, of course, but with caveats, which they knew I could not accept" (*The Blazing Chinar* 471). In distressing circumstances, Akbar Jehan performed the role of matriarch with alacrity and zest and ensured that the ceremony solemnizing her younger daughter's transition, an anxious moment for any woman, from her natal home to the traditional home of her in-laws was conducted in accordance with long-cherished tradition.

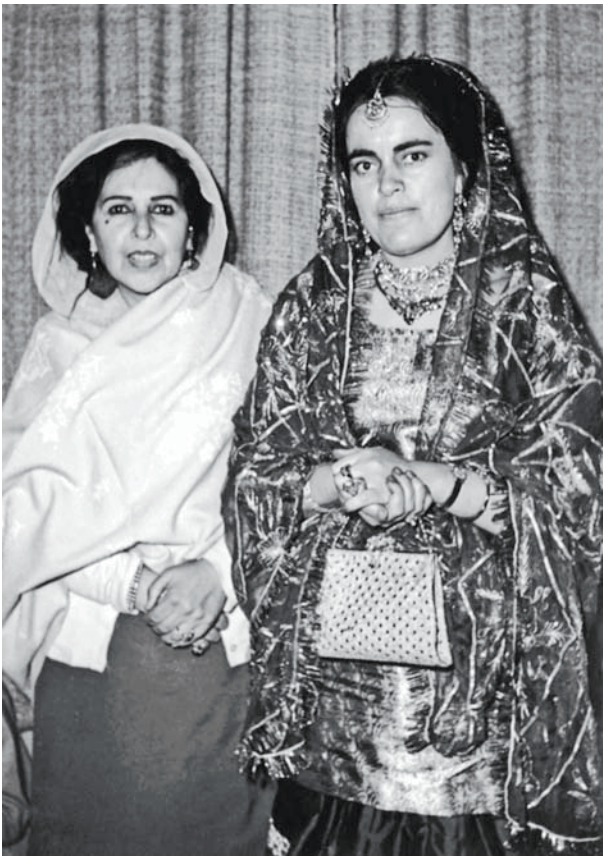

ILLUSTRATION 10: *Akbar Jehan with her younger daughter, Suraiya, at her Rukhsati. The vacuum created then by the absence of her father at one of the most significant milestones of her life was mourned by my mother, Suraiya.*

In order to return to the historical and political narrative of 1971, I quote Iftikhar Ahmad again, with whom the reader is acquainted. Iftikhar recounts that as he started to mature, he realized how important

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Akbar Jehan was to the Kashmir Cause, and a true and loyal supporter of her husband. In 1971, the Sheikh set up a proxy candidate, Shamim Ahmed Shamim, to contest the parliamentary election against Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad, who was the Congress candidate for the Indian parliament from Srinagar constituency. Shamim was a hard sell, because the political workers of the Plebiscite Front did not trust the man. But the Plebiscite Front had been outlawed, so no one from the cadre could be fielded as an electoral candidate. After a lot of discussion at 3 Kotla Lane, New Delhi, where the Sheikh and Akbar Jehan were in detention, Shamim was accepted as a candidate. It was decided that Akbar Jehan would go to Kashmir to campaign for him. Her trip to Kashmir was kept a closely guarded secret (e-mail to author, January 31, 2012).

With a wistful smile on his face, Iftikhar recalls that he accompanied her to Srinagar. He was absolutely certain that the government of India would obstruct her travel, but, surprisingly, their flight from New Delhi to Srinagar was uneventful. Shamim received them at Srinagar airport. Iftikhar still remembers the utter looks of disbelief on the faces of the Intelligence Bureau operatives at the airport on seeing Akbar Jehan. Shamim drove them to a public rally at Khanyar, next to *Dastagir Saheb's* revered shrine. The supporters gathered at the rally simply could not believe that Akbar Jehan was in Kashmir, campaigning for Shamim. The bugle of electioneering had been sounded; Kashmir was electrified. This, Iftikhar thoughtfully says, was no ordinary election. For the people of Kashmir, this election was akin to plebiscite (Ibid.).

Akbar Jehan made a passionate speech telling the electorate that India's time of reckoning had come. From Khanyar they drove to the family house in Soura. While showing me photographs taken on that occasion, Iftikhar remembers that within hours thousands of people and the entire press corps arrived. That was when "Grandmother" officially announced the support of the Plebiscite Front to Shamim's candidacy. She worked tirelessly, speaking at multiple public rallies every day. The electorate was ecstatic and charged. The opposition candidate, Bakshi, was unnerved. His insecurity came through loud and clear when he cancelled his tour of Muslim-dominated areas of India, where he had been scheduled to campaign for the Congress (Ibid.).

Prior to Akbar Jehan joining the fray, Iftikhar notes, Bakshi was almost certain of a landslide victory in Srinagar. During the course of campaigning for Shamim, her cavalcade was on its way to Charishareef in the Kashmir Valley when workers of the Plebiscite Front, who had

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been roughed up by the police, begged her not to proceed because they feared for her life. Iftikhar admits that he was terrified. Shamim thought it would be wiser to return to Srinagar, but Akbar Jehan vehemently disagreed with him. She was determined to march ahead. Charishareef was tense. They went inside the shrine of the legendary saint Nur-ud-Din Wali, flag bearer of Kashmir. As Iftikhar stepped out of the jeep to go inside the shrine, a huge boulder landed on the vehicle, destroying the windshield (Ibid.).

A pitched battle was fought by the workers of the Plebiscite Front against antagonistic forces, comprising Bakshi's workers and operatives of the Intelligence Bureau. After Akbar Jehan made a short speech, he narrates, they drove back to Srinagar in the same vehicle. Iftikhar observes, with tremendous pride, that the murderous attack on Grandmother sealed Bakshi's fate. He lost by a huge margin to Shamim, who then was a political greenhorn. "Kashmiris, for the first time after 1953, had sent a clear message to India"[1] (Ibid.)

Akbar Jehan and the Sheikh were constantly subjected to pressures of all kinds. Although the machinations of the government of India in Jammu and Kashmir, and the collusion of the puppet regimes installed by it in the state, coerced some of their supporters to maintain an unwilling silence and others to resign themselves to their miserable lot, Akbar Jehan and the Sheikh maintained their conviction to withstand those pressures.

They did not lose their strong ideals and never-say-die approach. They had cultivated an empathetic understanding with their supporters and constituents, which enabled them to forge a bridge of communication with them.

The significance of Akbar Jehan's role on the political landscape of Kashmir remained undiminished in the days to come. After Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad's abject defeat at the hands of a rookie, Shamim

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1 Lauding Akbar Jehan's pivotal role in this particular election, the Sheikh tells the reader that after having chosen Shamim as their proxy candidate, it was incumbent upon them to convince the people that Shamim enjoyed the support of the Plebiscite Front. "We," the Sheikh proudly says, "chose Begum Sahiba for this purpose and so arranged for her quiet journey to Srinagar. Braving the extremely inclement weather in Srinagar, she carried out the election campaign against Bakshi so vigorously that Shamim won the election and Bakshi had to bite the dust." This tremendous electoral battle "was symbolic. A man [Bakshi] who had ruled continuously for seventeen years in Kashmir was defeated by an anonymous man…. This development infused a new spirit into our people" (*The Blazing Chinar* 470).

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ILLUSTRATION 11: *They had a proclivity toward challenging and productively debating each other's opinions, which was the bedrock of Akbar Jehan's and the Sheikh's marriage.*

Ahmad Shamin, in the parliamentary election of 1971, which was a feather in Akbar Jehan's cap, her political acumen and clout were feared by the opposition. Subsequently, she was officially banned from entering the state. The exile of the Sheikh in Kodaikanal in 1964 and later in Delhi in 1968, and the restrictions that his conscripted existence placed on her, did not decrease her verve and political zeal. Her ability to think primarily about the larger objective never failed to bring dividends. Perhaps it was her proclivity to not seek personal credit for the accomplishment that not many political analysts have delved into her work in the

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parliamentary elections of 1971 and later in the state assembly elections of 1977. I recall her always displaying tactfulness while dealing with various kinds of people from different environments. Akbar Jehan, for the most part, did not forget that she was "not primarily dealing with ideas," but, on the contrary, she was "dealing with people through whom those ideas have to filter" (Roosevelt 142).

After careful thought I contend that the zeal, commitment, dedication, and strategic thinking with which the Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah-led National Conference participated in the state assembly elections of 1977 was a deafening response to the deplorable attempt of the Indira Gandhi-led Congress to dilute the credo of the Sheikh, Akbar Jehan, and their trusted colleagues. The Indira Gandhi-led Congress underscored, euphemistically, in yet another accord, the Indira-Abdullah Accord of 1975, that the voice of the Kashmiri people would be muzzled.

The military and political superiority of the India nation-state was well-established after the further division of the frayed Pakistani nation-state into Pakistan and Bangladesh, exacerbating the decay in the body politic of Pakistan. The conventional and brutal war between India and Pakistan in 1971 resulted in the creation of Bangladesh. This new reality caused a shifting of alliances and a shifting of balance of power. The consummate victory of the Indian military bolstered Indira Gandhi's position as premier of India, and she dealt with the demand for plebiscite in Jammu and Kashmir with a heavy hand. She declared that the Sheikh's insistence on restoring the pre-1953 constitutional relationship between the state and the Indian Union, which would afford greater autonomy and freedoms to the state, was inconceivable because, "the clock could not be put back in this manner" (Statement of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on Jammu and Kashmir in the parliament of India, New Delhi, February 24, 1975). I am of the firm opinion that in 1975 the Sheikh was faced with a choice that any statesman would dread having to face: "Will you stand firmly for a certain principle and risk defeat, or will you compromise on the issue so you will not be defeated and will still have an opportunity to accomplish other things?" (Roosevelt 203). History has borne witness to the inability of several stalwarts to achieve their ideals, because they took rigid and inflexible stands.

In order to achieve the larger objective, they have had to make compromises, sometimes unpalatable ones. Although there are times when I think that by ratifying the 1975 Indira-Abdullah Accord the Sheikh committed political hara-kiri, I have reason to believe that he never

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lost sight of his political goal, which was the well-being of the Kashmiri people and the credibility of their political voice, which had been, unapologetically, stifled since 1953. By evoking the moral consciousness of a nation, he appealed to the best in human nature. His struggle and that of his colleagues, he believed, "shifted from the streets to the conference table. It was a shift in methodology, not in objectives" (*The Blazing Chinar* 478). The task of healing a terribly corrupt and malignant body politic was placed on the shoulders of the Sheikh and his organization in that fateful era.

But the Indira-led Congress, true to its character, affected a breach of trust again. The Sheikh had devoted his life to the dignity of his people. He proclaimed, without any hesitation, that renouncing his position of power twenty-one years ago and accepting it once again in 1975 was, in his view, a means of upholding his values. He was distressed by the unrectifiable situation that had been created over the past twenty-one years. His dilemma was that, although "worldly wisdom demanded that I should sit on the fence and criticize others for their blunders," his entire life had been "testimony to the fact that I have never felt daunted by difficulties and never followed an escape route. That is why even now I do not flinch from my responsibility even in the face of severe odds" (*The Blazing Chinar* 479–480).

Critics of the Sheikh's seeming "capitulation" to the government of India in 1975 overlook the pervasive power of the Indian state, which had infiltrated into political, socioeconomic, cultural, and educational institutions. Regional political voices, which did not accept the high-handed supremacy of the Indian federal government, had either been banished or incorporated into mainstream Indian society. The disillusionment of the people with the electoral process caused them to become apathetic, which, in turn, was construed by the federal government as tacit accommodation with the political status quo. It was imperative then, that state actors in collaboration with other civil society actors focus on the rebuilding of a greatly polarized and fragmented social fabric to ensure the redress of inadequate political participation. It is just as critical now that state actors work in tandem with non-state actors in Jammu and Kashmir to insist on accountability for human rights violations through transitional justice mechanisms, reconstruction of the infrastructure and productive capacity of the state, and resumption of access to basic social services in post-1989 Jammu and Kashmir. They could then pave the way for sustainable peace, human rights, and security which would diminish

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the potency of militarized peacekeeping, following closely on the heels of militarized interventions.

A political movement that pays insufficient attention to the welfare of the populace, good governance, and rebuilding democratic institutions ends up leaving irreparable destruction in its wake. While focusing on the building and legitimization of a collective political identity, some political and militant nationalist movements make the grave error of turning a blind eye to the vitriol of corruption and inefficiency in the administrative set-up and educational institutions. The adherents of such movements are quick to make facile criticisms of the Sheikh's decision in 1975, and they overlook the political perfidiousness that had become the order of the day from 1953 to 1975. The translation of a political vision into reality requires an efficacious administrative set-up and vibrant educational institutions, which produce dynamic citizens. An insurgent or militant nationalist movement that lacks such a vision is bound to falter.

The Sheikh's determination to hold his own, despite having ratified the 1975 Indira-Abdullah Accord, made it clear to every governmental agency, bureau, and authority that he would not brook high-handedness from the Congress. It was also evident that he would not allow the mainstream national organization to trifle with regional politics. The Congress may have flirted with the idea that "following the signing of the Accord," they would compel the Sheikh to "take difficult and unpopulist measures, and then as in 1972, Indira would arrest" Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah "on some pretext and hand over the government" to her cohort (*The Blazing Chinar* 490). Even those who didn't see eye to eye with him believed that, if the Sheikh had lived longer, he would have been incarcerated yet again for his defiance of the federal government and the ruling political party in New Delhi. In this instance, the Sheikh's acuity served him well and he called for the holding of fresh state assembly elections, which the newly elected Janata government, led by Prime Minister Morarji Desai, in New Delhi facilitated.

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8

Reminiscences of a Granddaughter of the Electoral Battle of 1977

Abstract: *While Grandfather recuperated, Grandmother carried the onus of the election campaign on her shoulders. She campaigned in the entire Valley with unparalleled zeal. The unmistakable euphoria of that period could enliven and energize the most jaded observer, let alone an innocent child whose vision of the world was paradisiacal.*

Khan, Nyla Ali. *The Life of a Kashmiri Woman: Dialectic of Resistance and Accommodation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. DOI: 10.1057/9781137463296.0014.

I have interspersed my memories with descriptions of historical and political events in which Akbar Jehan and the Sheikh were principal political actors. My particular frame of reference, thus, shapes my historical interest and allows me to interpret the past as I see it.

The historic, enthusiasm rousing, and largely inclusive assembly elections of 1977 in Jammu and Kashmir saw a mammoth participation of the Kashmiri people. Grandfather had suffered a cardiac arrest and had to be confined to his high-ceilinged, sparse room, which was permanently furnished with a beige arm chair, a teak board armoire, a teak board bed, a prayer rug, a rosary, and windows, which looked out onto the loquat tree on the lush lawn. After having filed his nomination papers in Gandarbal constituency on June 4, 1977, he undertook a grueling journey to Budgam, which was where he felt an excruciating pain in his chest. That agony exacerbated into incapacitation. He was admonished by the doctors and categorically told to refrain from the laborious work of campaigning.

The lawn of Grandmother's and Grandfather's house was flooded with throngs of people who would wait for hours to catch a glimpse of their ailing leader. Grandfather would hobble to the porch every couple of hours, supported by his cardiologist, Dr. Jalaluddin, to spend a few minutes with the people assembled there. While Grandfather recuperated, Grandmother carried the onus of the election campaign on her shoulders. She campaigned in the entire Valley with unparalleled zeal. Grandfather ingenuously observes, "My wife had to work strenuously. On the one hand, she was worried about my health, while on the other, she had to travel across far off areas. But she faced all this with patience" (*The Blazing Chinar* 495). I give her credit for having the political insight to comprehend that the transformed nature of the struggle required a new vision and pioneer spirit, which is an understanding that evades some of the most committed politicians and implacable activists.

I vividly remember that the first election result to come in was from Pattan town in the Kashmir Valley. The National Conference candidate in that constituency, Abdul Rashid Shaheen, had been declared victorious. I watched, safely ensconced in a corner of Grandfather's room, when Shaheen walked in to be greeted by proudly smiling Grandmother and Grandfather, who garlanded him with undiluted happiness. The unmistakable euphoria of that period could enliven and energize the most jaded observer, let alone an innocent child whose vision of the world was paradisiacal. I had the naivety to believe that the ecstatic reception

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of victorious candidates at the Sheikh's residence was seen with delight by one and all. I recall that at the victory celebration at the Polo Ground in Srinagar, which was presided over by Grandfather, he was exhausted and enervated. Still recuperating, he was unable to make a lengthy speech so he recited some verses from the Quran in his sonorous but weakened voice. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that the people at the rally were transported into a rhapsodic state when he raised his hand to proclaim his recognition of and gratitude for the trust they had reposed in him. Not many understood, at the time, that he wore a crown of thorns and his path was beset with insuperable difficulties: "On 9 July, accompanied by my wife, I went to Raj Bhavan at ten O'clock in the morning and took oath of office and, thus, found myself once again in a situation with heavy odds facing me" (*The Blazing Chinar* 498).

Whatever one's political persuasion, it would be difficult to deny that in that day and age the Sheikh had the charisma and magnetism to sway public opinion in his favor, and he exercised an uncanny clout on the masses. Even his adversaries acknowledge that he had an inimitable ability to inspire and persuade the masses from the podium and, despite the feisty opposition to him from some quarters, could stimulate action. Here, I take

ILLUSTRATION 12: *By all accounts Akbar Jehan and Sheikh forged a marital bond in which they nurtured and supported each other.*

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a pause in my recollections, and paraphrase the illustrious revolutionary poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz's reminiscences of Kashmir in the 1940s. With his political acumen, depth of character, and inimitable clarity, Faiz reminiscenced that Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah "created for the Kashmiri a sense of selfhood." Faiz asserted that it was undeniable that the Sheikh had inspired the people of Kashmir to protest against the degrading treatment meted out to them by their despotic rulers. The Sheikh, Faiz observed, was a proud Kashmiri, and "whatever Kashmir has achieved or done, he was responsible for it and this was because of his total and complete identification with his people" (Quoted in Taseer, 259).

When I try to recall the vicissitudes of the 1970s, as apprehended by a child, I can hear the audible running to and fro of political workers, some bleeding profusely after having been manhandled by members of the opposition at polling booths, standing ramrod straight to tell their leader that they would brook every harassment and ford every stream in their endeavor to carve a political space for Kashmiris, which had been denied them for more than two decades.

And through the turbulence, the commotion, the enthusiasm, and the oscillations, Akbar Jehan remained unshaken and unshakeable. She was fighting for a legitimate cause, the pledge of self-determination that she had been a party to, and underpinning her convictions was her warmth. She, like the Sheikh, believed that the politics of the Indian subcontinent was becoming increasingly riven by communal hatred and essentialist identity politics. Akbar Jehan and the Sheikh had cultivated the relentless patience and understanding to persuade their adversaries about the legitimacy of their political position. They firmly believed and articulated, without any bitterness that "They [members of the government of India] have to understand that no advantage is gained if some go on repeating, parrot-like, day in and day out, that Kashmir belongs to India, 'It is ours; it is ours'" (Abdullah, *Kashmir,* 7–8).

The valiant struggle for the independence of India from British colonial rule, which had witnessed ideological, religious, and ethnic adversaries transcending their differences in order to cement anti-colonial nationalism was, Akbar Jehan and the Sheikh believed, the leading exemplar of patriotic virtue. In its determination to obliterate colonial rule, India had shown that "no power, no country can retain for all times to come, any other land by force of arms." The remarkable struggle for independence in 1947 had been the fight of a courageous people to gain and protect their fundamental rights, to which, Akbar Jehan and the Sheikh reiterated, the

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people of Kashmir were equally entitled. Laws made for border states in the geographically distant parliament of India in New Delhi were unimpactful unless the people of Kashmir accepted them. At great risk to his person and to the survival of Akbar Jehan, the Sheikh thundered, "It is the sovereign Parliament of India which has recognized a number of times that the accession shall be determined by the free will of the people of Kashmir. ... Take away the bayonet and see what will happen. You will succeed if you can win the hearts of the people there" (Ibid.).

Reader, you are astute enough to realize that this is, by no means, an attempt to write a "resurrection narrative," but I cannot lie to you about my perception of events and political incidents back then. I cannot underestimate your intelligence by pretending that the political stature of Akbar Jehan and the Sheikh in my childhood did not draw me into a state of wonder and dreaminess. I have always been inspired by political idealism, and by the steadfastness and fortitude of such idealists in facing the hard knocks that life deals them. But I am also distressingly aware of the atrocities inevitably inflicted on such idealism, particularly by nation-states that, by their nature, do not brook opposition. Through their idealism, or because of it, the Sheikh and Akbar Jehan sought to "appeal to friends in India and Pakistan to understand our misery, to know our agony and not withhold from me and the people of the state [Jammu and Kashmir] the warmth of the human heart" (Abdullah 17).

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9
Home and Hearth

Abstract: *The bedrock of Akbar Jehan's and Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's marriage was a proclivity to challenge and productively debate each other's opinions. I learned early in life that people like Akbar Jehan and the Sheikh, who were in public service, were dangerously vulnerable in their public life and lived in glass houses. This was and remains especially true for women. The quickest and easiest way, even in the twenty-first century, to alleviate the angst caused by a politically influential woman is to slander her. One such libelous story was of Akbar Jehan's betrothal or marriage to Lawrence of Arabia.*

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What did the negotiation between Akbar Jehan's private self and her public persona entail?

Characteristically, Akbar Jehan's warm home was a public space in which she had carved out a few private places. The downstairs living room served for formal entertaining as well as a more intimate sitting room, in which Akbar Jehan, the Sheikh, their children, and grandchildren religiously convened every evening. In the sparsely furnished dining room, with a table that could seat eight people, elaborate meals were served only during Ramadan. That was when all and sundry, those rigorously fasting as well as those who ate on the sly all day long, would gather to partake of the delectable fare and the atmosphere of a deep-rooted calm and tranquility.

Contrary to expectations and speculation, the home of Akbar Jehan did not have priceless pieces of furniture nor was it decorated with inlaid antiques. Their somber yet elegant way of life did not, I respectfully observe, showcase a lifestyle that could be achieved only in a society of servants and inanely dependent wives. The home of Akbar Jehan and Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah effused warmth, belonging, and comfort, but not magnificent luxuries or resplendent accouterments. It was a milieu in which relationships were enacted and bolstered by the carrying out of ordinary practical rituals—watching the evening news, relishing 5:00 pm high tea, breaking fast in the month of Ramadan, discussing the headlines, playing board games, and breathing in the sense of security that even the smallest gesture exuded.

I don't remember Akbar Jehan's bedroom ever being immaculately neat. It was just as skimpily decorated as the rest of the house, and always in disarray. The bookcase was deluged with religious texts; the clutter on the dressing table; the antiquated transistor and incense holder on the nightstand; the exquisitely woven prayer rug, which was draped over the headboard, with its tassels knotted around the round knob of the headboard; these rich textures remain in my memory. Suraiya, who has always had a proclivity for tidiness and organization, would carefully organize her mother's closet every evening, trying to restore order to the confusion.

Although unmethodical and disorderly, Akbar Jehan was a meticulously clean person. When it came to personal hygiene, she was absolutely impeccable and nourished her pasty white hands with fragrant creams, which was the one luxury she allowed herself. The bright-colored traditional clothes with which she adorned herself reflected her warm and

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brisk personality. Being a woman of strength and conviction, she had no desire to keep up with the Joneses and did not covet finery or exquisitely designed jewelry. Having, of her own volition, sold the antique and priceless jewelry bequeathed to her by her mother, Rani jee, during the trying years between 1953 and 1975, she was quite content with her pair of paisley shaped gold earrings on delicate gold chains and a gold bangle, which, for a woman of her generation, symbolized marital status. It always amused me when acquaintances would slyly ask me how much gold my grandmother had gifted to me, because I was well-aware of the non-existence of any "royal coffer." I learned early in life that people like Akbar Jehan and the Sheikh, who were in public service, were dangerously vulnerable and lived in glass houses.

By all accounts Akbar Jehan and the Sheikh forged a marital bond in which they nurtured and supported each other. Marriage at the time was the conventional and obligatory narrative to which most women conformed. The quality of their marriage, by all indications, manifested itself in the durability of their friendship, the equality of the husband's and wife's quests, and the willingness to bicker, which spoke of their interminable solicitude for each other. Here, I take the risk of trying the reader's patience by quoting Stanley Cavell, whose *Pursuits of Happiness* is an engaging and delectable marriage manual: "in God's intention a happy conversation is the chiefest and noblest end of marriage. ... Here is a reason that these relationships strike us as having the quality of friendship, a further factor in their exhilaration for us" (87). The happiest and most compatible marriages might not always subscribe to the rigid model fashioned by patriarchy, but couples that are fortunate enough to find themselves in such relationships reaffirm each other's existence emotionally and intellectually. Such couples have a proclivity to challenge and productively debate each other's opinions, which was the bedrock of Akbar Jehan's and Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's marriage.

The companionship and support that they gave each other sustained them in the most adverse circumstances. They nourished each other as they ventured forth into a world of political hustle and bustle and consoled each other as they endured the crucibles that life forced them to bear. They faced a harsh and judgmental world standing side by side while emphasizing the inextricability of their fates. The wise as well as the not-so-wise well know that every marriage has its trials and tribulations. But a marriage that can endure periods of distress by cementing a bond that fathoms the complexities of a public life and supports the risks

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entailed in the pursuit of that life emerges triumphant, despite the odds. I can hear the reader sighing exasperatedly while reading or is the reader tolerating my perceived naivety with an unparalleled kindness?

While I do not mean to be dismissive of reader reactions I would emphasize that Akbar Jehan was well aware that in choosing to spend her life with the Sheikh, she was renouncing the possibility of the stagnant comfort of domesticity and a placid old age. She did not, either privately to her children or publicly to her peers, express any regret or blame her husband for the pain that is an integral part of a life lived in the implacable public glare. Akbar Jehan, unlike quite a few of her generation, discovered in the public space a place where she could explore her persona and enact her dreams.

She had an enviable love of life that gave her the ability to cherish every small blessing and to recognize that the world owed her nothing. She had the self-assurance and courage "to treat life as art: to bring all [her] energies to each encounter, to remain flexible enough to notice and admit when what [she] expected to happen did not happen" (Angelou 66). Although marriage between two strong-willed people can never be completely without trouble, Akbar Jehan made adjustments and ran her home to suit the way of life of the Sheikh. She could be intractable at times, but, historically, women have made compromises and adapted their own dreams and ambitions to accommodate the needs of their spouses, children, and communities.

As I point out in the Preface, her desire for emancipation was mediated by a sense of responsibility to her community and, I might add, life partner. Some of us may turn our noses up at that, but I am inclined to believe that a woman like Akbar Jehan, intelligently, adjusted her requirements to those of her husband's and his political cause, enabling her to make good use of every period of her life, except, perhaps, the very last. As a wise woman observes, "To be unable, because of inflexibility, to readjust to changes will result in a kind of sterility, great unhappiness, and sometimes almost a state of shock" (Roosevelt 81).

As the years have gone by, I have realized that gender norms in the developing world as well as the developed world have conscripted the wide range of female activity. The quickest and easiest way, even in the twenty-first century, to alleviate the angst caused by a politically influential woman, whose communitarian work entails surmounting barriers, is to diminish her. That is usually done by bringing her repute into question. Akbar Jehan's advocacy of education, health care, and

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political rights for women, with the resources available to her and within a particular social order, was modern. The problems that she confronted, a lot of which women continue to confront even in the current era, were archaic. But even she wasn't immune to slander.

I was greatly enraptured by the myth that she had been betrothed or married to Thomas Edward Lawrence aka Lawrence of Arabia (1888–1935), a British Army officer and a prolific writer, much before she met the Sheikh. Lawrence, as several works on him corroborate, worked in British India with the Royal Air Force (RAF) from 1926 until 1929. Despite his unparalleled ability to adapt to the local cultures in which he lived and functioned, he was accused of working as an anti-Soviet British spy in the North West Frontier Province in 1928 (NWFP). One of the disguises that he donned, according to several reports of doubtful veracity, was of a bland Muslim cleric, *Pir* Karam Shah. Tariq Ali, Pakistani historian, dogmatically writes about this purported union in his writings on Kashmir. According to him, the story about the betrothal or marriage of Akbar Jehan to Lawrence was relayed by Benji Nedou, Akbar Jehan's younger brother, which, for him, made it the gospel truth. He further asserts that once Lawrence's espionage activities and his real identity were discovered, Akbar Jehan's father orchestrated their speedy divorce, after which Lawrence surreptitiously returned to England ("The Story of Kashmir," *Clash of Fundamentalisms,* 217–252). Sometimes gossip gets legitimized as history.

While I greatly doubted the veracity of this tale and thought it was just a yarn, my sense of decorum made me hesitate to ask Akbar Jehan about the authenticity of this narrative. Fortunately, I stumbled upon the school project of writing a fictional story for my tenth-grade English class, and finally summoned the courage to ask her about this story. She was telling the beads of her rosary and making rhythmic movements while reciting verses from the Quran when I audaciously brought up the subject. A ray of sunlight beamed into her lap, and she looked at me with a penetratingly earnest gaze and replied that slanderers who took delight in defaming God-fearing women wouldn't escape the wrath of God. She assertively told me that this tall tale was just another fabrication, the purpose of which was to denigrate her and to belittle her work.

In an e-mail exchange with my former professor, Stephen E. Tabachnick, who is a renowned T. E. Lawrence scholar, I asked him about the authenticity of this story, telling him it had preyed on my mind for some time. Professor Tabachnick emphatically stated that he was

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speaking as someone who had studied and written on Lawrence for forty years, and who was the author of *Lawrence of Arabia: An Encyclopedia* among other books on Lawrence. Professor Tabachnick unequivocally pointed out that "the story of that betrothal or marriage is completely false. If it had happened, it would have been impossible to keep secret, especially given Lawrence's world-wide fame. And given Lawrence's homosexual tendencies and flagellation compulsion, the odds are really against this story's being true." He pointed out that the best biographies of Lawrence were by John Mack and Jeremy Wilson. He observed that neither of them had mentioned this apocryphal story, and nor had any of the many other biographies of Lawrence that Professor Tabachnick was familiar with. "Surely one of Lawrence's fifty-plus biographers would have come upon the story by now" (e-mail to author, March 19, 2014).

In refuting the myth of Akbar Jehan's betrothal or marriage to Lawrence of Arabia, he quoted from the "India" entry in his *Lawrence of Arabia: An Encyclopedia* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004):

> Lawrence left for India in December 1926 on board the troop ship SS *Derbyshire*. From January 7, 1927, to May 26, 1928, he served in the Engine Repair Section at the Royal Air Force depot at Drigh Road, Karachi…. He was then transferred to Miranshah, near the Afghanistan border, where he served as a clerk…. However, in September 28 newspapers began false accounts of his alleged spying activities in Afghanistan, and on January 12 he was sent to England on board the SS *Rajputana*. Both Karachi and Miranshah are in what is now Pakistan. A.W. Lawrence's *T.E. Lawrence by His Friends* contains three memoirs by servicemen who knew him during this period. He displayed little interest in India and did not leave either camp. (86–87)

"In view of this last sentence," Professor Tabachnick asserted, "the story concerning your grandmother seems even more unlikely than it already does" (Ibid.). Concocted stories gather weight by being repeated, so I couldn't let this myth go without dispelling it. A biographer cannot build an edifice on shaky ground, which is why, in writing about the marital bond and home of Akbar Jehan and the Sheikh, it was important for me to clear any lurking doubt about this apocryphal narrative.

Every historical biography has political and social implications. I am not just interested in what my subject did, but also in what she believed and what she thought she was accomplishing. As oral historian Alessandro Portelli notes, "Subjectivity is as much the business of history as the more visible 'facts' " (67). So before dwelling further on the political conditions

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and historical context that produced Akbar Jehan, I interject a personal story which provides insight into my subject's cultural identity.

Her long years in the unsentimental skullduggery of politics hadn't robbed her of a genuine sense of humanity. I remember our trip to idyllic Gulmarg in the Kashmir Valley in the summer of 1989. Akbar Jehan, my parents, and I drove to a *Gujjar* settlement in the area. Driving over undulating hilly terrain with our car windows rolled down, the becalming breeze soothing everyone's frayed nerves, we stopped at a neat settlement of thatched roofed mud huts.

On hearing Akbar Jehan's name, the inhabitants of those huts, young, old, and adolescent, came running out, helter skelter, to welcome her with warmth. The women wore colorful clothes and beautifully embroidered caps with silver ornaments. They formed a deferential circle around her and sang Gojri folksongs in their rich contralto voices. Some of the songs, which were doleful and evoked nostalgia, brought tears to Akbar Jehan's eyes, and she cried with the abandon and simplicity of a child. She had a passionate pride in her *Gujjar* heritage.

Although the term "*Gujjar*" is often derogatorily used by some people as synonymous with "barbarian," "ignoramus," "uncivilized," and was covertly and overtly hurled at Akbar Jehan by her political foes, she never hesitated to own that part of her lineage. She, in fact, instituted developmental and educational programs in an effort to bring that community out of the quagmire of illiteracy and unemployment. I am not, by any means, suggesting that the *Gujjar* community of Jammu and Kashmir is fully literate and employed. On the contrary, the community still has an arduous climb and a long road ahead, but she did initiate the process of improving their lives and assimilating *Gujjars* into the mainstream.

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10
End of an Era

Abstract: *I learned that Grandfather had breathed his last on the evening of September 8, 1982. I interject personal memories into the political and historical narrative, inviting biographical interpretation.*

Khan, Nyla Ali. *The Life of a Kashmiri Woman: Dialectic of Resistance and Accommodation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. DOI: 10.1057/9781137463296.0016.

It wouldn't be remiss of me to admit that until 1984 Grandmother was a peripheral presence in my life. She was a benign, affectionate, slightly detached, and much lauded presence in Grandfather's lifetime, but not at the center stage of my existence. It was later that Grandmother and I developed a delightful, enriching, and volatile relationship. At times, she and I would give each other the silent treatment, but there were also times when she and I would have absorbing conversations as the day would fade and the twilight evening would dispel any resentment that might have been lingering in the air.

I remember her as a self-assured, articulate, politically savvy, and elegant person, whose social and political activism didn't dwindle till very late in life. In the initial years of my coming to consciousness and getting to know Grandmother, she didn't seem racked by self-doubt. She maintained a firm conviction in the ideological platform from which she and her husband had launched an irrepressible fight against iniquitous monarchical and nation-state politics.

After the death of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, her older son, Farooq Abdullah, much to the gratification of the indulgent mother, was made head of government. The investiture of Farooq, indubitably, allayed whatever anxieties might have gnawed at Grandmother at Grandfather's demise. At the time, there was a genuine fear that the death of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah would create an abyss that would cause an unredeemable political bankruptcy in the state, and regional aspirations would be asphyxiated by the politics of the Indian and Pakistani nation-states. Although the National Conference did have a substantive ideology and a mass base at the time, I would argue that the organization had become increasingly reliant on the cult of personality, particularly on the iconic status of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. Grandmother, who had been his comrade in the years of political exile, well knew that his dominance and clout couldn't be replaced, but the strength of the mother-son nexus superseded her well-founded doubts. Subsequent to the formation of the cabinet under Farooq's leadership in September 1982, she ceased to be first lady but she retained her position as patron of the political organization founded by the Sheikh, and her counsel was held in high regard by the party cadre.

In her several visits to Kashmir in the late 1970s and early 1980s, an astute Kashmir observer, Bilquees Taseer, carefully noted that Akbar Jehan was "given a share of the reverence which they [populace of Kashmir] always held for her husband. She was the person who could give him

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peace and solace in his tempestuous life" (250). Bilquees Taseer was the widow of the renowned educationist Dr. Mohammad Din Taseer, and mother of the late Governor of the Punjab in Pakistan, Salman Taseer, who was assassinated in 2010 by his bodyguard for having opposed the arbitrary and notorious blasphemy law of Pakistan. I remember Bilquees Taseer rather fondly as Aunty Chris, an imposing, voluble, and politically astute writer. I think of her as one of the last vestiges of the British Raj. She would affectionately call Akbar Jehan "Ruhi." She would stay at Nedou's Hotel in Srinagar on her frequent visits to the Kashmir Valley. Nedou's Hotel was then owned and run by Salima Nedou, the widow of Harry Nedou aka Ghulam Qadir and sister-in-law of Akbar Jehan. At the time, Taseer was immersed in carving a sharply defined perspective of Kashmir for her forthcoming book.

She wrote about the unremitting dedication of Akbar Jehan to her husband in 1982, the year of the Sheikh's death. Taseer poignantly writes that on closer acquaintance, she found Akbar Jehan an astute, discerning, and insightful woman, "with all the politics of the State and of the Union at her fingertips." Akbar Jehan's education, reading, and travel had broadened her horizons and having been immersed in momentous changes in subcontinental politics "for forty-nine years as a partner of an outstanding leader had all developed in her a sense of judgment, political intuition and wisdom" (112). She was affected with great wonder at Akbar Jehan's calm demeanor and tactful diplomacy with visitors of all hues and from all walks of life during her husband's illness. She, Taseer notes, tirelessly supervised the ameliorative care of her husband's illness, "no light task when visitors were pouring in all day. ... Always she had to show patience, good temper, tact. Her tirelessness was amazing, for after all she is now not a young woman" (89).

September 8, 1982, is a date that is indelibly etched in my mind for several reasons, some of which I have reassessed over the years. Grandfather's illness had been causing a lot of concern to Mother and her older sister, who with the solicitude of dutiful daughters wanted to be by their father's side at all hours of the day. So, a couple of months before he died, I would go to his house everyday after school where I would find Mother taking care of household chores, supervising the servants, and administering medications to her father. I would spend my time in the living room adjacent to Grandfather's bedroom, where I would assiduously do my homework and study the Quran with the *Maulvi*.

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One afternoon, exhausted and disheveled after a particularly tedious day at school, I limped into the living room to see Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India, sitting there with Grandmother and my aunt, Khalida. Mother, who has carefully and very deliberately avoided hobnobbing with political bigwigs for most of her life, was hovering outside the living room. I, a ten-year-old glamour-struck child, was overwhelmed to see the Indian premier exchanging pleasantries with Grandmother and sitting close enough for me to touch her.

I followed my aunt Khalida, who gingerly tiptoed into Grandfather's bedroom and gently whispered in his ear that Indira Gandhi had flown from New Delhi to Srinagar just to call on him and inquire after his health. Grandfather turned away and cynically said that she was there to see how much life he still had left in him and to make sure that he, indeed, was on his last legs. His cynical response, however, did not deter the rest of the family from escorting Indira Gandhi into his room, where she tactfully expressed her concern for the stalwart leader against whom

ILLUSTRATION 13: *L to R: Governor of Jammu and Kashmir, B. K. Nehru, Mrs. Nehru, Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, and Begum Akbar Jehan Abdullah. The older son of Akbar Jehan and Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, Farooq Abdullah, is standing in the back row. Indira Gandhi deployed every stratagem in the book to undermine the idealism, courage, and passion of the Sheikh.*

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she and her father had deployed every stratagem in the book and the unbridled power of the state.

The air was thick with tension, and Grandfather was guarded in his responses to the Indian premier, suspicion writ large on his face. Grandmother was a gracious hostess and made small talk, all the while giving cryptic answers to questions asked by Indira Gandhi about Grandfather's health and prognosis. Grandmother's diplomatic skills were lauded by those who knew her. She had the discernment to receive visitors with the utmost charm and civility, while keeping an adversary at arm's length. Little did anyone know that the Indian premier was already orchestrating a rift within the National Conference and the irreparable division of Akbar Jehan's and the Sheikh's family, which she engineered not long after Grandfather's death.

A few days after that much publicized and impeccably diplomatic visit, I was taking Math tuitions, one afternoon, in the tiny and sparsely furnished room just above Grandfather's bedroom, which didn't do much to rid me of my Math dyslexia. I could hear an audible rattle through the window. Happy in my child's fantasy world of fairies and elves that would vanquish the monstrous mathematical and algebraic formulae that my tutor was badgering me with, I didn't realize that the audible rattling sound was Grandfather's beleaguered breathing. Much to the chagrin of my tutor, I lost interest in my homework and looked through the window only to see everyone running helter skelter. Mother's cousin, Freddy, came bounding up the stairs to tell her that "Papa" was asking for her. The newspaper that Mother had been reading flew out of her hands, and she ran downstairs in disarray.

I, not being able to navigate my way through the agitated crowd that had gathered outside Grandfather's bedroom, made my way to the house of Grandmother's younger brother, Benji, which was a stone's throw away. I pushed, shoved, and elbowed to make my way through the main gate, which was thronged by a multitude of people. The evening air was laden with the stifling heaviness of slogans, the piercing keening of women, and the swishing sounds of young boys flagellating themselves, marking their bodies with visible signs of bereavement. The frightening roar of vehicles, chaotic screams, unbearably loud sounds of mourning, and the frantic patter of running feet around Grandmother's brother's house shook me into a startled wakefulness at first light. I learned that Grandfather had breathed his last on the evening of September 8. His corpse, subsequent to the ritual cleansing, had surreptitiously been taken

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to Polo Ground in the wee hours of the morning, where it would lie in repose for the next two days. Senior politicians of different ideological orientations and senior administrators feared that taking Grandfather's body to the Polo Ground in full view of the already overwrought and emotionally agitated people thronging the gate of his house would make it difficult to rein in sentiments and could further destabilize the already fragile situation.

I recall spending that entire day in a disoriented daze, running in and out of the women's pavilion, where Grandmother, Mother, and Mother's older sister, who although distraught and utterly devastated, were forbearingly listening to the entreaties of the mourners to remain fortitudinous. Grandfather's bedroom was denuded of his pain-filled eyes that had told thousands of stories of brutally crushed aspirations, his enchanting but melancholic smile, and his temperate presence. The defining presence of my childhood, much loved and just as much vilified, was no more! Death, the ever vigilant and cruel overseer had, once more, established its inevitability! There is no God but God! From God we come, and to Him we return!

The flags that flew at half-mast that day were symbolic of the diminution of the ideological underpinnings of a mass movement for Kashmiri nationalism, and of the mourning for an abraded Kashmiri identity. In that distressing, heartbreaking, and passionate atmosphere, Grandmother stood with her shoulders squared and employed religious rhetoric to remind the mourners in the front lawn of her house that even the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) could not escape the clutches of death, let alone an ordinary mortal. In a strong voice, she implored them to be patient and told them that the greatest tribute they could pay to Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah was to show the world that they were an evolving nation, capable of maintaining an enviable calm even in difficult times. I sat behind her on bended knees while she importuned the crowd of mourners to remain stoic, wondering, with the befuddlement of a ten-year-old child, how a sense of orientation, order, and clarity would ever follow the fluster and tumult of those few days!

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11

I Witness That Faith Is the Legacy of One's Upbringing

Abstract: *In my quest for inspiration, I allow myself another interjection here. Akbar Jehan did not propound a regressive discourse or a determinate concept of Islam.*

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Although the narrative is shadowed by my respect for my subject, it is not a work of pious memorialization.

I would venture to say that subscribing to religious traditions and maintaining an unshakable faith in providence provided her with an anchor in such times of extreme distress, pain, and loneliness. Skeptics might be critical of her unwavering faith in Sufi saints and mystics, and those who adhere to a puritanical version of Islam might question the juxtaposition of her veneration of saints with the iconoclasm that Islam advocates.

But I posit that her reverential adoration of Sufi saints did not espouse a traditionalism that made unconditional of what was, at best, a secondary good. On the contrary, her intimate knowledge of Islamic epistemology and her well-honed and nuanced comprehension of the intricacies of Quranic discourse buttressed her faith in Sufis of the Chisti, Kubrawi, Naqshbandi, Qadiri, ad Soharwardi orders. I would be lying to myself if I didn't admit that there were times when I thought her unshakable faith in ritualism and traditionalism was flawed, and that her susceptibility to believe in the putative sincerity of *pirs* (I have committed a translation of *pir* here, opting for "caretaker of a shrine or a mosque, who may be an erudite scholar and practitioner, or the descendant of one") was rather naïve.

But she believed, with a winsome credulity and clarity that praying at the portals of a hallowed site, or covering the grave of a saint with an embroidered cloth, would cure her of all afflictions and would restore the body politic of Kashmir before the scourge of undemocratic practices impaired it beyond recognition. Visitation at shrines and tombs was an integral part of her religious experience. She believed that one of the most efficient methods of deflecting malignant forces was the amulet, which is "a passage from scripture used as a prophylactic shield against harm or the container that holds the holy words" (Doumato 149). Akbar Jehan, paradoxically, a well-educated and well-traveled woman, of a scientific temperament had an unshakable faith in specialized religious knowledge that enabled practitioners to "prepare writings for amulets, utter healing words correctly, and prescribe what were called Prophetic medicines" (Doumata 131).

I witnessed her ineradicable faith in the miracle attributed to *Khawjah* Moinuddin Chisti, thirteenth-century Sufi saint of the Chisti order. I accompanied her to the shrine of *Khawjah* Moinuddin Chisti in Ajmer several times, which, according to her, was one of the most sacred sites

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for votive rituals. Votive rituals at shrines have been a part of the religious life of the Kashmiri Muslim community in which women as well as men participate. I remember being overwhelmed by the incontrovertible reverence with which she prostrated herself at the shrine. The grandiose structure, the pennants around the edifice, the beautifully carved frieze around the imposing dome, and the reverence with which devotees flocked to the shrine provided a magnificent backdrop to Akbar Jehan's spirituality.

Faith is a legacy of one's upbringing, and I owe my ingrained reverence of Sufi *dargahs* to Mother and Father. The wise say that "faith can move mountains," and I believe that Akbar Jehan's faith gave her the pugnacity and resoluteness to face the many whirlwinds that caused chaos in her immediate as well as distant world. I note that she had tremendous respect for what she called "real" learning as opposed to the regurgitation of tradition and rote memorization, which is common, at the risk of generalization, to many people. She was quite willing to openly discuss political movements to meanings of customary practices and their implication for what was taught in the Quran.

While she lived with my parents and me, she would enrich my Arabic and Quranic education. I was taught to read the Quran by a mild-mannered and congenial *Maulvi*, who, surprisingly, took delight in my childish pranks. He would relish his afternoon tea in the paneled study while listening to my rendition of the Quran, interspersed with shenanigans. But every time Akbar Jehan would preside over the lesson, the *Maulvi* would magically metamorphose into a serious scholar and would grandiloquently recite religious verses in crescendo.

She would listen to his recitation with her hands held up in supplication and tears flowing down her face. I am inclined to believe that a genuine mystical experience was invoked in her by the rhythmic sounds of the recitation. She had studied religious scriptures comprehensively, and perceived a higher content in rituals and external observances than just the emotional response that is elicited by the sound of prayer. Akbar Jehan did not propound a regressive discourse or a determinate concept of Islam. In other words, her religious and sociopolitical ideologies allowed negotiation between different value systems.

The rigidity of a religious discourse that doesn't enable such a negotiation rends the consciousness of the Kashmiri subject, who is caught in the quandary of living her life in the constant epistemological tension of having to take more than one reality system into account. Akbar

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Jehan would explain that the model of hierarchy between men and women might be institutionalized in legislations made and executed by the state or in Muslim Personal Law, but gender ideologies are neither impenetrable, nor do they remain fixed till kingdom come. Even when cultural values and religious law are incorporated into legislations, they are capricious and subject to personal discretion (Doumato 2000: 228).

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12

My Memories of Akbar Jehan: Orator, Parliamentarian, Woman of the Soil

Abstract: *Akbar Jehan instinctively knew that reforms and consciousness raising could occur most decisively at the grassroots level, not in the corridors of power in New Delhi nor in the plush halls of parliament.*

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Given the substantive role that Akbar Jehan played in political events, she cannot slink into the shadows.

Akbar Jehan's oratorical skills were known to all and sundry. Bilquees Taseer witnessed her skill and proficiency as a speaker at the *Urs* [religious festival] of *Pir* Zaman Shah of Malamkam village, near Wulur Lake. *Pir* Zaman Shah was a supporter of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and had a large number of devotees in the state. Each year in August *Pir* Zaman Shah had an *Urs*, which was attended by all his devotees, who camped in the grounds around his hillside house and were fed by him.

"Jammu region," Taseer informs her reader, "is multi-racial, multilingual and multi-religious and here 250 dialects are spoken, while the Valley has Kashmiris and also the tribes such as Bakarwals and *Gujjars*, who move from place to place along with their cattle." Most of the *Pir's* acolytes were from the Jammu Region, where most people speak Dogri and Punjabi, with a smattering of Urdu. In the Valley, Kashmiris speak Kashmiri and Urdu; *Gujjars* and *Bakarwals* speak Gojri. "Begum sahiba," Taseer respectfully narrates, "spoke for more than an hour, first in Kashmiri, then at murmurs from the Jammu-ites she switched to Urdu, then at murmurs from the *Gujjars* and *Bakarwals* to Gujri, all with equal ease." Taseer records, "The amount of effort she put in for those 20 days would have broken a younger woman, but for one who has now reached her seventies the achievement was phenomenal" (249–250).

I witnessed Akbar Jehan's vigor in the electoral battlefield in 1984. I remember being "chosen" to accompany her on her election campaign to Damal Hanji Pora, Anantnag. Although I was becoming aware of the unaccountable power of the nation-state on its citizenry, I had a potent sense of the power of the mass base enjoyed by the National Conference (a regional organization which had historically challenged the increasing centralization in the Indian federal structure), back then. I am talking about a time much before the decline of that political organization in the nationalist imagining of Kashmir.

It was on this rapturous campaign that the force of the people's will was clearly manifested. In late 1984, soon after the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, parliamentary elections were held in India. Although the National Conference was a house divided against itself and had, yet again, been undemocratically undermined by New Delhi, the organization decided to throw the gauntlet and fielded candidates in all the parliamentary constituencies in Jammu and Kashmir. Akbar Jehan was their candidate in Anantnag constituency for the 1984 parliamentary

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elections. Although she was by no means young, she embraced the challenge with open arms and contested the election with an inimitable vigor.

At the time, Damal Hanji Pora in Anantnag was represented by National Conference's Abdul Salam Itoo in the state legislative assembly. It was he who had organized a rousing reception for Akbar Jehan in his constituency. After the arduous drive to the area because of the milling crowds that forced her loyal chauffer, Ghulam Qadir, to stop the vehicle every few miles, the walk to the dais was interrupted at every step by enthusiastic supporters stopping Akbar Jehan to kiss her hand or her forehead. The atmosphere reverberated with slogans and hand waving in support of her candidature. She would stand with the force of her conviction on makeshift daises and employ religious and democratic rhetoric to instill confidence in those who, time and again, had been betrayed by the machinations of nation-states.

Members of the political cadre in Anantnag constituency would vie for her time and attention. Not once do I remember her complaining or refusing to indulge a political worker. I recall going to four small villages and one large town with her on that particular campaign. On every dais, she thundered that the faith of the electorate in democratic politics would be restored. She categorically denounced the divisive and duplicitous politics of the Congress. She was willing to climb every mountain and ford every stream to relay her political message of regional pride, Kashmiri nationalism, and assertion of people's power. (It is ironic that soon after those elections, her older son, Farooq Abdullah, forged an alliance with the very same Congress in the 1987 assembly elections.) By the end of the day, her throat was hoarse and the endless cups of *noon chai* (salt tea) hadn't helped much, but she remained indefatigable. Her hard work bore fruit when the National Conference won a landslide victory in those elections. Amid much jubilation, exultation, and overwhelming defeat of the Congress in the Valley, she was elected to represent Anantnag constituency in the lower house (Lok Sabha) of the Indian parliament.

Mother and I accompanied her to New Delhi for the swearing-in ceremony at the parliament. We sat in the gallery overlooking the floor of the parliament and watched with rapt attention when Akbar Jehan, in an unwavering voice, took the oath in Kashmiri, silencing the laughter and jeers that had accompanied her colleague Saif-ud-Din Soz's oath taking in Kashmiri prior to hers (in the ever changing political combinations and permutations in the volatile state, Saif-ud-Din Soz is now president of the

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Congress in Jammu and Kashmir). Her distinctive confidence came from, I observe, "the sense that ... choice is a burden, bringing an inevitability of suffering, but still the sense of specialness is there" (Bateson 42).

Akbar Jehan did not shirk from attending parliamentary sessions, but her heart lay in Kashmir. Her political growth had occurred and her conviction had strengthened while working at the grassroots level. She instinctively knew that reforms and consciousness raising could occur most decisively at the grassroots level, not in the corridors of power in New Delhi nor in the plush halls of parliament. I would venture to say that the many harangues, digressions, and red tape of parliament couldn't engage an activist who had, for all intents and purposes, worked

ILLUSTRATION 14: *I remember Akbar Jehan self-assured, articulate, politically savvy, and elegant person, whose social and political activism didn't dwindle till very late in life.*

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in the trenches and walked shoulder to shoulder with the stalwarts of the anti-monarchical, anti-colonial, and Independence movements of the Indian subcontinent.

I recall, with a kind of strange happiness, Akbar Jehan writing notes to herself every evening during a summer parliament session in 1985, telling me that she would be vocal in her denunciation of the mental and physical shackles imposed on the people of Kashmir, which, she thought, was done in the name of "democracy," "religion," "justice," and "peace." In some quiet moments that she and I shared at the dinner table, she would tell me that the structures of governance might change, legal discourse might change, but it was armed might that bestowed authority on nation-states, giving them the legitimacy to wage wars and to annihilate peoples in the wake of those wars.

Akbar Jehan was a politically seasoned person who had consciously undertaken an uphill climb and had partaken in a ferocious political battle against an inveterate foe, the Indira Gandhi-led Congress, and against those in the Pakistani nation-state who perceived the Sheikh's antipathy to the partition of India along religious lines as treachery. But, to her chagrin, she found herself entangled in the murky web of factionalism within the National Conference, now led by her older son. The political organization founded by her husband was losing its status as the upholder of regional aspirations and adversary of the centrist policies of the government of India. She also found herself entwined in combinations and permutations that didn't bode well for the political well-being of either the political organization which she represented or the state, and which hadn't been engineered either by her or by the surviving members of the Sheikh's loyal contingent.

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13
A House Divided against Itself

Abstract: *In 1984, the imprint of the invisible hand of the Congress could be seen not just in the factionalism within the National Conference, but also in the irreparable rift created in the family of Akbar Jehan and the Sheikh. Political opportunists and carpetbaggers made hay while the unpredictability remained unresolved, destroying political autonomy and creating institutional paralysis in its wake.*

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Akbar Jehan's political thought manifested itself in the dialectic of resistance and accommodation.

Akbar Jehan's well-cultivated self-discipline, which becomes more important as one gets older, had enabled her to regulate her life and routine sagaciously. I don't recall her becoming self-indulgent or ever becoming obsessively absorbed in the mundane details of daily life. She didn't lose interest in people until the very end of her life. It can be terribly difficult for someone who has led a purposeful, albeit grueling, life to adjust to the decrepitude brought on by old age. But even in her old age, Akbar Jehan resisted yielding to self-pity and lived to the best of her ability. It was only toward the end of her life that she was given to bouts of depression.

My bond with Akbar Jehan grew stronger in and after 1984. That year, the democratically elected government of Farooq Abdullah, Akbar Jehan's older son, was toppled by his brother-in-law, Ghulam Mohammad Shah. Akbar Jehan's older daughter, Khalida, and her husband, Ghulam Mohammad Shah, orchestrated a putsch in cahoots with the Indira Gandhi-led Congress. My fondness for my aunt and her husband does not deter me from being critical of the undemocratic nature of that coup d'état. The fall-out of the coup was that Ghulam Mohammad Shah was made the head of a coalition government that enjoyed the outside support of the Indira Gandhi-led Congress. In other words, the state cabinet comprised those National Conference members of the legislative assembly who, under the aegis of Indira Gandhi, had changed loyalties, and their ministerial positions were legitimized by the external support of the Congress. The imprint of the invisible hand of the Congress could be seen not just in the factionalism within the Farooq Abdullah-led National Conference, but also in the irreparable rift created in the family of Akbar Jehan and the Sheikh. Subsequent to the disconcerting disclosure that twelve trustworthy veterans of the National Conference had transferred their allegiance to the breakaway faction of the parent organization, the Awami National Conference, led by Ghulam Mohammad Shah, and that the oath of office had been administered to Shah at the official residence of the governor of the state, Jagmohan, Akbar Jehan moved to my parents' house.

She had a terrible sense of isolation and misgiving at her residence on Maulana Azad Road which was adjacent to her older daughter Khalida's house. At the time, she felt comfort in maintaining a physical distance from the jubilant celebrations of Shah's political workers and supporters.

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About Akbar Jehan's dilemma, Suraiya observes, "Mummy was a staunch supporter and defender of my older brother Farooq, when he was in office as well as when he was out of office" (e-mail to author, February 14, 2012). She considered it incumbent upon her to make obvious her predilection for her older son at the expense of her motherly solicitude for her older daughter, Khalida. This is where I realized that, although Akbar Jehan hadn't lived in an environment in which she had been told that women were incapable of significant achievement, she considered it her bounden duty to reinforce the culturally supported attitude toward mothers, which was the expectation of their unquestioning constancy and devotedness to sons, especially first-born sons.

Toward the end of the nineties and the early part of 2000, Akbar Jehan was more of a figure head than a power broker within the National Conference, an organization that had dominated populist and electoral politics in the state for a long time. Her symbolic significance remained robust and did not wane even with the rise of the younger generation to the echelons of power in the organization. Some young turks in the organization might have regarded her as a spent force, but they continued to vie with one another for her presence at their political rallies. The organization sought to gain legitimacy for its unpopular alliances, forged with the Congress and the ultra-right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party in 1987 and 1996, respectively, by showcasing the patron of the organization at the ratifications of those alliances.

Just so the reader and I are on the same page, it might be efficacious to recapitulate the circumstances that led to the forging of the aforementioned political alliances and their grievous fall-outs for regional politics in Jammu and Kashmir. The shoddy dismissal of Farooq's government, which I have written about in *Islam, Women, and Violence in Kashmir*, orchestrated by New Delhi's political grandees showed an insensitive disregard for the political will and aspirations of the Kashmiri people, and brought political indifference in its wake. In 1986, the Congress central government dismissed the G.M. Shah government and Governor Jagmohan took over as the representative of the central government and effective ruler of Jammu and Kashmir. The rationale given by New Delhi to arbitrarily replace Shah with Jagmohan was the collapse of the law and order machinery. The prevalent uncertainty helped in the institutionalization of corruption. Political opportunists and carpetbaggers made hay while the unpredictability remained unresolved, destroying political autonomy, in the aftermath, and creating institutional paralysis.

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Quite a few political analysts and opinion makers have summarized the destructive effect of the policies deployed by New Delhi and its political and military interference in the state during that fateful decade of the 1980s.

In late 1986, Farooq Abdullah conceded that in order to remain in government in the state, a regional organization had no choice but to placate the federal government in New Delhi. So he made the Hobson's choice of forging an alliance with the Congress, which had formed the central government in New Delhi. The cementing of this alliance was an apocalyptic event, portending, as future events showed, the disintegration of regional aspirations. Farooq's attempt to bring about a rapprochement with the Congress regime was met with great disillusionment by National Conference's popular base, but enabled his installation as head of government pending fresh assembly elections in March 1987.

Elections were held in Jammu and Kashmir in 1987 in order to constitute a legislative assembly and a state government. By then, as I have commented in several publications, the working committee, comprising the top brass of the National Conference, had managed to create a wide gulf between itself and its popular base, and represented only the interests of an influential political elite. The methods employed in this election worsened the mood of indifference and political disinterestedness in the Valley. The credibility of regional politicians was jeopardized, by their tacit approval of the strategies of the federal government to manipulate the political situation in Jammu and Kashmir to its own advantage. The disconnect between the leaders of the National Conference and the masses caused a political and ideological crisis within the organization. Once the populace of the Kashmir Valley lost hope of equality in voting, effective participation, and achieving regional integrity and the autonomy it had once held, armed struggle gained impetus in that province.

As the decade of the 1990s dawned, the politicial, cultural, and socioeconomic fabric of Kashmir was severely impaired by the free rein given to Indian military and paramilitary forces to quell dissidence, and also by Pakistan-trained militants who, in a no-holds-barred conflict, inflicted atrocities on their co-religionists as well. New Delhi hadn't succeeded in consolidating democratic institutions in the state, which could have enabled effective participation. India's political and democratic practices, as Robert A. Dahl observes, "have displayed some egregious shortcomings from a democratic point of view. It has suffered from recurring violations of basic rights" (161). The disillusionment created by New Delhi's

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ploys, and the warped motive of the Pakistani military in spurring the growth of a jihadist element in Kashmir and facilitating the infiltration of armed combatants across the Line of Control (border separating Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir from Pakistan-administered "Azad" Kashmir) generated a militant movement in the state. A large number of young men from various parts of the Kashmir Valley crossed the Line of Control in search of ammunition and combat training. What began as a skirmish over the quashing of democratic institutions in Jammu and Kashmir had erupted into a conflagration that swept the Kashmir Valley and some parts of the Jammu province of the state.

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Conclusion

Abstract: *On July 11, 2000, Grandmother died a sad woman. Her biography is a branch of the tree of history, and reflects a version of the social politics of Jammu and Kashmir at crucial junctures before and after the partition of India in 1947.*

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I admit that her daughter's, my mother's, unconditional love for her and unflinching loyalty toward Grandmother was a little difficult for me, an only child, to reconcile. My house, until Grandmother came to live with us in 1984, had been my turf, which no siblings ever intruded upon. But once Grandmother's political colleagues, workers, and loyalists descended on my parents' house to consult with her on matters of political import and the precarious future of the state, my thirteen-year-old embryonic sense of self felt threatened. My adolescence was thus greatly infused with political uncertainties, manipulations, the blatant dismissal of the democratic rights of the people of the state, and the hurt that the people of Jammu and Kashmir, particularly of the Kashmir Valley, nursed.

The insurgency and counterinsurgency in the state in 1989–1990 unnerved many parents, who were afraid for the security and lives of their children. The perceptible uncertainty, particularly in the Kashmir Valley, made the commute to my educational institution a daunting task, and regular working days were few and far between. In May 1990, my parents, who all along had been overly protective of me, made the hard decision to send me to college in New Delhi, so they could fashion a regular life for me, away from the precariousness and manifest ephemerality of life in Kashmir. I was eighteen years old at the time. But I always carried Kashmir inside me, wherever I went: the verdure, the aromas, the majestic panorama juxtaposed with the pain, the anger, the grief, and the despondency became an integral part of my being. While in New Delhi, the physical distance from my parents and my unsettled homeland failed to allay my sense of insecurity; I experienced despair at the disintegration of familiar spaces, and heavyheartedness at the bruising of the Valley.

I traveled to Kashmir for my summer vacations with an insatiate hunger for home and hearth, and an excitement that knew no bounds. After the sweltering heat of Delhi, the nippy air of Kashmir, in the months of May and June, made aromatic by the swathes of dahlias and gladioli, swaying to the sounds of birds and crickets' susurrating through the fluttering leaves was a pleasure to my young mind and fluttering heart. But it didn't take long for the general despair, hopelessness, and apathy to set in. I would invariably spend those summer evenings with Grandmother, Mother, and Father under the blossoming tulip tree in the middle of my parents' rolling lawn. The political apathy, military high handedness, disrepair of old institutions, moral turpitude, and tattering of society in the

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nineties was reflected in our conversations, most of which were about a present blemished by the torrent of militant rage and violence, and the nebulousness of an unforeseeable future.

Mother reminisces that the years of insurgency and counterinsurgency in the Valley were very difficult for my parents and more so for Grandmother. Their movements, during that militarized, politically unstable, and psychologically agonizing period, were greatly restricted. They were, thus, isolated from the larger society. Grandmother, Father, Uncle Tariq, and Mother would spend so much time in my parents' garden that they even adjusted the television in the garden so they could watch the news out in the open. Mother observes, "This was our dismal attempt to resist the claustrophobic and oppressive environment which was haunting everyone in the Valley in that punishing decade." Grandmother was advised by her well-wishers to leave Kashmir, but she remained adamant in her refusal to do so. As Mother told me, "It was her faith in God that helped her to face the hardships of those exacting years" (e-mail to author, February 14, 2012).

The situation created an ontological insecurity. I think we experienced terrible unease at the time because we were excluded from familiar routines, sharpening the realization that trust and confidence could no longer be reposed in the surrounding environment. Grandmother once had a powerful political voice within the now defunct Plebiscite Front and the National Conference. Not only had she been a decision maker in the higher echelons of the organization, but she had also been a force to reckon with in a society that sets much store by the role of a dutiful spouse, who was politically savvy and had facilitated the inclusion of women into the political fold.

In the nineties, the National Conference, like other mainstream political organizations in Jammu and Kashmir, was in a state of immobility and stupor. At the time, the organization lacked direction and structure, but Grandmother, despite her frailty, remained a rallying point for those old loyalists who hadn't disavowed their allegiance to Kashmiri nationalism. For those loyalists, politics was not governed by pragmatism but by conviction and the ability to sway public opinion in one's favor by charisma, which was an attribute of those who invoked the moral, legal, and constitutional authority of the people's voice.

Grandmother died a sad woman, having witnessed the distortion of her husband's political agenda, the disintegration of the political and socioeconomic institutions built and fortified by her husband through

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decades of political wilderness and ferocious opposition which had taken their toll on him. Grandmother had bolstered her husband's strength, his political commitment, and assiduously worked toward the materialization of his vision. In his years of incarceration, 1953–1975, she had raised five children, three sons and two daughters, by herself, in a politically repressive environment that peripheralized and sought to erase the ideological bulwark of which she had been one of the architects.

Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah dictated his auto/ biography to his scribe, Mohammad Yousuf Teng, a couple of years before his death in 1982, when he was in the twilight of his life. He was in his early mid-seventies then. That is a time in one's life when one's vulnerability and mortality stares one in the face. Perhaps when the outer layers of life have been peeled off and all a person is left with is the core that egotistical considerations and power struggles cease to dictate thoughts. It was at that precarious juncture of staring death in the face that the Sheikh reminisced over the upheavals in his and Akbar Jehan's life, and talked of how the two of them had weathered storms together.

Despite the palpable hostility toward the Sheikh in the 1990s, approximately a decade after his death, and the misattribution of multitudinous motives to him, his political credo remained an article of faith for Akbar Jehan. The Sheikh, despite the political compromises and expediencies required in the oscillating and vast spectrum of subcontinental politics, believed that the course of Kashmir's political destiny would be charted by its people:

> *Yih mulk tumhara hai, yih mulk kisi aur ka nahin.*
> *Yih Roos, America, Pakistan ya Hindustan ka nahin hai.*
> *Yih mulk yahin ke Hinduon, Musalmanon aur Sikhon ka hai.*
>
> (Quoted in Beg, 47)

> This land [Kashmir] belongs to you, not to anyone else.
> It does not belong to either Russia, or America, or Pakistan, or India.
> The land belongs to the Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs of Kashmir.
>
> (Translation is mine.)

The decade of the nineties was bereft of hope for Grandmother. Despite the antagonism toward the National Conference manifested by both state actors and non-state actors and the increasing vulnerability of the organization's cadre, Grandmother made a firm and unwavering decision never to leave the Valley. Although the transmogrification of the Valley into a virtual battle- ground made political activity impossible,

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she held the opinion, perhaps naively, that rule of law would prevail, and the power of democratic principles would not be superseded by the corrosive discourses of militarization and autocratic fiats.

After a lifetime of political action, Grandmother had found it difficult to adjust to the militarization of Kashmir and the subsequent waning of the National Conference, which, to her great disappointment, had ideologically deteriorated after the death of her husband. The thought of being the last remnant of a dying world wasn't a pleasant one for her. With the death of the Sheikh in 1982, she lost her life's emotional center. With the disintegration of the sociopolitical fabric of Jammu & Kashmir in 1989, the values for which she had fought and made great sacrifices slowly became enfeebled.

The woman who had played a significant role in the consolidation of democratic elements in the state, who had braved many a storm to bolster the Sheikh's fight for self-determination for the Kashmiri people, watched, with pain-filled eyes, as her ideology was made irrelevant not only by the militarized interventions of India and Pakistan, but also by the fragmentation in Kashmiri society. Akbar Jehan had been one of the pioneers of the broadening of the intellectual and cultural horizon in Jammu and Kashmir. Toward the end of her life, she watched that horizon violently smashed.

The past nearly twenty-five years of armed conflict in Jammu & Kashmir, 1989–present, have witnessed the emergence of a plethora of political actors with diverse ideologies, motives, and aspirations. The conscription of a legitimate political space attempts to decimate institutions of governance, and the inability of political organizations in the state, mainstream as well as separatist, to uphold and voice regional political aspirations have caused a loss of faith in democracy. There exists an unfortunate lack of knowledge about the decades-long evolution of a nationalist and political consciousness in Kashmir. Despite consistent attempts to denigrate the Sheikh's secular credo by labeling him a "traitor," he, Akbar Jehan, and their comrades did not let their faith in the preservation of a Kashmiri identity, which entailed "religious unity in the fight for people's rights," waver (Bourke-White 210). Akbar Jehan's relation to the age is a political issue, which I couldn't overlook in this narrative.

It took me a while to forgive myself for not having been by Grandmother's side when she died. On the morning of July 11, 2000, while gathering information about the latest happenings in Kashmir

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from internet sources in my sanctum sanctorum, the cluttered study, in Norman, Oklahoma, I received a call from Father. He informed me, in a barely controllable voice, that Grandmother had died at around 10:20 am that morning. At the time of her death, Mother, Father, Mother's older sister, Khalida, Mother's brother, Mustafa, her cousin, Sheikh Nazir, and Grandmother's cardiologist, Dr. Jalaluddin, had been with her. Mother tells me that while the rest of them were milling around Grandmother's room, Mustafa, unable to hold back his emotions, had cried out that they were losing her. She died of a myocardial infarction. Grandmother, without uttering a word or expressing any emotion, had breathed her last in the doleful and properly funereal Valley.

I cannot express my grief and terrible sense of isolation felt at that moment in Norman, Oklahoma, where I could not break through self-created walls to pour my heart out to friends and acquaintances. It seemed so difficult to lift the mood of dispiritedness and melancholia that had engulfed my family and me. I was able to derive some solace, however, from the organization of a *Nimaz-e-Janaza* (funeral prayer) at the *Masjid* (mosque) in Oklahoma City. The Muslims of the community,

ILLUSTRATION 15: *Grandmother, without uttering a word or expressing any emotion, breathed her last on July 11, 2000, in the doleful and funereal Valley. It seemed so difficult to lift the mood of melancholia that had engulfed my family and me.*

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even those who had never known her, gathered to offer their collective prayers for the salvation of the departed soul. In life as in death, it was her tenacious certitude that "*Glory belonged to God, and exalted was His majesty, and there was none to be served besides Him*."

This biography is a branch of the tree of history, and reflects a version of the social politics of Jammu and Kashmir at crucial junctures before and after the partition of India in 1947. I end this narrative with a vague and regretful sense of loss, because when I stop writing, I must let go of my subject, which is hard for a biographer. I promise the retreating wraith of my ancestor that whether the reader sees her life as a model to be emulated or condemns her personal and political choices, she will not drown in oblivion. I reiterate that in telling the story of the public life of Akbar Jehan as opposed to probing her interiority, I have attempted to glimpse her more through her public persona than her private life.

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Appendix: Reminiscences about Women's Agential Roles or Lack thereof, 1947[1]

Do women's multiple narratives reveal a capacity for alternative ways of negotiating the construction of conflictual identities? Does the assumption of agential roles by traditional women in a patriarchal culture cause an identity conflict crisis which can be resolved through a firm commitment to specific values and goals? While reminiscing about Akbar Jehan's significant role in 1947, Krishna Misri writes about the formation of the National Militia and Women's Defense Corps—volunteer forces of men and women organized under the leadership of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah—to ward off the onslaught that occurred on 22 October 1947 when hordes of tribesmen from the Northwest Frontier Province, under the patronage of the Pakistani army, crossed the border of the princely state of J & K in order to coercively annex the region:

> In the absence of a competent civil authority, volunteers of the National Militia filled the void. They patrolled the city day and night with arms, kept vigil, guarded strategic bridges, approaches to the city, banks, offices, etc. With preliminary training in weapons, some of them were deployed with army detachments to fight the enemy at the war front. With its multi-faceted and radical activities, Women's Self

1 From "Negotiating the Boundaries of Gender, Community, and Nationhood," in *Islam, Women, and Violence in Kashmir.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010: 113–144.

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> Defense Corps (WSDC) was a harbinger of social change. It provided a forum where women steeped in centuries-old traditions, abysmal ignorance, poverty and superstition could discuss their issues. Attired in traditional Kashmiri clothes and carrying a gun around her shoulders, Zoon Gujjari symbolized the WSDC. A milk vendor's charismatic daughter, hailing from a conservative Muslim family that lived in downtown Srinagar, she received well-deserved media coverage. My elder brother, Pushkar Zadoo, joined the National Militia, while I along with my sisters, Kamla and Indu, became volunteers of WSDC. We were first initiated into physical fitness and then divided into smaller groups where weapons' training was imparted. It was essential to follow the instructions given by our instructor, an ex-army serviceman to a tee. Soon we understood the operational details of loading and unloading a gun, taking aim, and finally pressing the trigger. To get acclimatized to shooting the 303 rifle, sten-gun, bren gun and pistol, practice drills were organized in an open area, known as "Chandmari." The initial nervousness soon gave way to confidence and we would hit the target when ordered. For all parades including "ceremonial guards" and "guard of honor," the practice was that men's contingents were followed by women's contingents.During that invasion of 1947, Begum Akbar Jehan undertook exhaustive relief work to rehabilitate displaced and dispossessed villagers. She addressed the volunteers on political issues to raise their political consciousness. Miss Mahmuda Ahmad Shah, a pioneering educationist and champion of women's empowerment, along with other women, was in the forefront of WSDC. Begum Zainab was a grass-root level leader. She took charge of the political dimension of WSDC. Shouldering a gun, she was in the forefront, leading women's contingents. Sajjada Zameer Ahmad, Taj Begum Renzu, Shanta Kaul, and Khurshid Jala-u-Din joined the "Cultural Front" and worked with Radio Kashmir as anchors, announcers, and actors. Several women writers and poets emerged on the literary scene and contributed to the cultural renaissance that followed down the decades. (e-mail to author, dated April 5, 2008)

Women, as evidenced by the work of constructive and rehabilitative work undertaken by political and social women activists in the former princely state during both turbulent and peaceful times, have more or less power depending on their specific situation, and they can be relatively submissive in one situation and relatively assertive in another. Assessing women's agency requires identifying and mapping power relations, the room to maneuver within each pigeonhole and the intransigence of boundaries (Hayward 1998: 29). The level of a woman's empowerment also varies according to factors such as class, caste, ethnicity, economic status, age, family position, etc. Also, structural supports that some

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women have access to bolster their commitment to action. In 1950, the government of J & K developed educational institutions for women on a large scale, including the first Government College for Women. This institution provided an emancipatory forum for the women of Kashmir, broadening their horizons and opportunities within established political and social spheres. Higher education in the state received a greater impetus with the establishment of the Jammu and Kashmir University (Misri 2002: 25–26). The mobilization of women from various socio-economic classes meant that they could avail themselves of educational opportunities, enhance their professional skills, and attempt to reform existing structures so as to accommodate more women.

Realizing the significance of oral historiography and the importance of preserving it for posterity, I touched base with Sajjida Zameer, a dedicated member of the WSDC in 1947 and former Director of the Education Department, J & K. I also wanted to delve into the politico-social activism of women like Begum Akbar Jehan, Sajjida Zameer, Krishna Misri, and Mehmooda Ahmad Ali Shah in order to study their transition from keepers of home and hearth to people who saw themselves as a social force to be reckoned with. Within the confines of nationalist discourse they claimed the right to define themselves. Sajjida was in the forefront of the cultural movement, designed to awaken and hone a political consciousness through mass media:

> In the early 1930s Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah spearheaded the struggle for a socialist, democratic government under the banner of the Muslim Conference. He had a very clear vision for Kashmir. Maharaja Hari Singh's rule hadn't done anything for the masses. While select courtiers and those who enjoyed royal patronage became richer, the poor led a truly miserable existence. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah wanted the support of Indian leaders and masses to gain freedom from the Maharaja. While the rest of India chanted "Quit India" to the British, we in Kashmir chanted "*Kashmir Chhod Do*" ("Quit Kashmir") to the Maharaja's government. I was very impressed by the fervor to build a new Kashmir. The slogan was, "*Kashmiriyon utho, yeh jang hai apne aap ko banana ki*" ("Wake up Kashmiris, this is a battle to create yourself anew"). On 3 September 1947, under Operation Gulmarg, Pakistan initiated its raid across the state borders. The state administration was in shambles and the unending stream of refugees from Pakistan created many problems for the ruler. The Maharaja fled to Jammu, leaving Kashmiris to be brutally killed by the intruders. At this stage it was Abdullah who took charge and enlisted the help of civil society to save human lives. Even before Indian troops landed in Srinagar, the citizens of Kashmir had organized

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themselves into a militia to protect the land from raiders. Young men who had never seen a gun, let alone handled one, volunteered to join the militia. The women's militia was formed simultaneously in 1947. The slogan that inspired us was "*Kadam kadam bhadayenge hum, mahaz pe ladenge hum*" ("We will advance step by step to fight on the front"). Women, men and children were infused with a sense of patriotism. It was with this spirit that the people of Kashmir lived without salt for six months. Food items were to be supplied by Pakistan under the Standstill Agreement, but Pakistan with-held supplies of essential commodities in an attempt to force the issue of accession. The common Kashmiri puts a pinch of salt even in his/her tea. Yet people did not complain. There was a unifying bond of nationalism, a feeling that we could overcome all hurdles. Men and women joined together to form committees to prepare the people of the former princely state to fight against marauding raiders. I was able to follow the battles fought by the army due to my involvement in the women's militia. My husband, who was in the men's militia, kept me posted with all the details. I was an active volunteer in the militia. We were trained in the use of firearms by Indian army officers. Often firing competitions were held at Badami Bagh cantonment. At one competition I fired on target. General Cariappa, who was the chief guest, asked me to fire again to ensure that the bull's eye was not a mere fluke. I fired bang on target again, to win the "Brigadier Lakhinder silver Cup." I went to hospitals to visit the soldiers with homegrown fruits and vegetable. Some of them were so young and were away from their families. But their cheerful courage was heart-rending. For the first time I realized that war is initiated by Machiavellian politicians, but soldiers lose their lives and the masses are put through untold misery. Many army officers stand out in my memory for the way they carried out their duties. War was thrust upon India when Pakistan sent tribal irregulars and its soldiers into the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. Even as the situation in the Kashmir Valley was stabilized, the threat continued to be serious in the Jammu region. On 3 November 1947 the raiders reached Badgam a few miles from the Srinagar airfield. Major Somnath Sharma was sent to Badgam. Being outnumbered by seven to one, Sharma immediately sent a request to Brigadier Sen for reinforcements. He knew that if the enemy advanced any further, the airport would be lost and Kashmir would become a province of Pakistan; the airfield was the only lifeline between the Kashmir Valley and the rest of India. His last wireless message stated that they would fight to the last man and the last bullet. Soon after, Somnath Sharma was killed by a mortar. In November, I remember there was absolute panic because 3,000 enemy troops were on the outskirts of Srinagar in Shalateng, just four miles from the city centre, preparing to attack the city. In a brilliantly planned and executed operation, Colonel Harbaksh Singh attacked Shalateng on 22 November and routed

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the Pakistani raiders. Finally, Brigadier Sen was able to lure the raiders into the net of Indian forces, near Shalateng. The raiders were defeated and the threat to Srinagar was over. If the capital city had fallen, it would have been one of the greatest disasters for the people of Kashmir. Today, there would have been no talk of self-determination for Kashmir. We would have been administered stringently like a poor cousin of Pakistan, similar to Pakistan-administered Kashmir. I wonder how many Kashmiris realize this. The militia worked with the army, guiding them through unfamiliar terrain, gathering vital information and giving details of the raiders' movement. The women's militia played a substantive role in repulsing the raiders. Zoon Gujjari of Nawakadal, Srinagar, Jana Begum of Amrikadal, Srinagar, and Mohan Kaur, a refugee from Baramullah, Kashmir, were active participants in the women's movement. Kashmiris from all walks of life, irrespective of religion or race, actively participated in the various activities of the Cultural Front of the militia. Prominent among the Kashmiri participants were Mehjoor, a very famous poet who wrote poems about Kashmir, its freedom and secular traditions. Other well-known indigenous poets in the movement were Noor Mohammed Roshan Arif Beigh, Premnath Pardesi, Pushkar Baan, Mohanlal Aima, Ghulam Mohammed Rah, and Abdul Sattar. Lending his voice to their verses was Abdul Ghani Namtahali (from Wathura Budgam, Kashmir). I must also mention Ghulam Qadir, a small-time businessman who would partake in the activities.

I joined the cultural front due to a crisis situation that arose when the leading lady, Ms. Usha Kashyap, in the play *Kashmir Yeh Hai* (*This is Kashmir*) had to leave due to some pressing personal problem. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, first Prime Minister of independent India, and other dignitaries were due to arrive to watch the play written by Professor Mehmood Hashmi, a refugee from Jammu who had fled to Srinagar. All the members of the Cultural Front pleaded with me to take over Kashyap's role. I had just a few days to prepare for the grand event. However, the play was a huge success and it moved the audience to tears. We staged another play during that time, *Shaheed Sherwani* (*Martyr Sherwani*), written by Prem Nath Pardase whose illustrious son Som Nath Sadhu, along with Pushkar Bhan, later aired a very popular program, "*Zoon Dab*," on Radio Kashmir. I also worked for Radio Kashmir whenever required sans remuneration. Also, I vividly remember the role played by Sumitra Lakhwara and her sisters who worked relentlessly round the clock with the women's militia. Members of the women's militia hoisted the flag of Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir when Abdullah was sworn in as prime minister of the state in 1948. Sumitra, her sister and I passionately sang the anthem of the state, "*Leheraaye Kashmir ke Jhanday*" ("The flag of Kashmir is unfurled and flies high"), at the ceremony.

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> After the attack by Pakistani raiders was successfully repulsed, the men's militia was amalgamated into the Indian army as the Jammu and Kashmir Light Brigade. The amalgamation, however, was not with retrospective effect, from the day the militia was formed, but from a later date. This affected the seniority of the officers and soldiers of the Jammu and Kashmir Light Brigade. The fact that the amalgamation came into effect from a date later than the actual formation of the militia was construed as the Government of India's attempt to discriminate against Kashmiris. (e-mail from Sajjida Zameer to author, dated 1 April 2008)

Ironically, women in J & K have not yet found niches in the upper echelons of decision-making bodies—political, religious or social. Asymmetrical gender hierarchies legitimized by the forceful dissemination of fundamentalist and militarized discourses portend the debasement and prostration of women.

Kashmiri society needs to recognize the terror caused by such predatory discourses that swoop down on the vulnerable, devouring their ideological and experiential strengths. The retrieval of the strength that nurtured the rich experiential content of the teachings of mystic poet Lalla-Ded, the conviction of the women volunteers of Women's Self-Defense Corps, the vision of women activists who were harbingers of change in the sociopolitical and cultural realms, would facilitate the recomposition of women's roles in the significant process of nation-building.

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